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ABSTRACT

This compendium provides 73 programmatic approaches for involving parents in their children's education. These strategies demonstrate the broad range of ways in which principals and teachers communicate with parents and work to help them support their children's learning. The strategies are organized into six categories. The first is home-school communications, which includes approaches for introducing families to school policies and programs, ongoing communication, ways to create a "welcoming environment," ways to improve communication with hard-to-reach parents, and outreach strategies. Under the second category, parents as supporters of the school and their children's learning, approaches for recruiting volunteers and encouraging parent are approaches for recruiting volunteers and encouraging parent involvement, and ways for community businesses to acknowledge parent volunteers are described. Strategies discussed under the category of parents as teachers involve school-based workshops and information for parents, and specialized workshops in community settings. The parents as learners category includes approaches for providing homework assistance, encouraging outside reading, tutoring, recruiting parents to serve as mentors, and enhancing education outside of school. The fifth category, parents as advisors and decision makers, includes strategies for parent representation on committees and councils and the invitation of parental input. The last category, support systems that help schools expand parent involvement in education, provides strategies for school-based and community-based support systems. (GLR)

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# PARENT-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

# A COMPENDIUM OF STRATEGIES

# FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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Office of Community Education

Massachusetts Department of Education

Winter 1990

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# PARENT-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

# A COMPENDIUM OF STRATEGIES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Published by
**OFFICE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

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Members of the **Massachusetts Community Education Advisory Council** reviewed successive drafts of this booklet and provided information on a broad range of school and community based strategies for involving families.

**Massachusetts Department of Education staff** have shared information on the range of ways in which their units promote parent involvement and on effective programs in local schools and school systems. We appreciate the time and interest of the following Department units:

Adult Education
Chapter 1
Chapter 636
Early Childhood Education
Educational Equity
Nutrition
Occupational Education
Special Education
Transitional Bilingual Education

Meetings with **representatives of institutions of higher education** have helped to increase our awareness of the research on parent involvement in education. They also provided information on model programs in which these institutions were involved and with which they were familiar. Meetings were held with:

| | |
|---|---|
| Kathleen Camara | Tufts University |
| Don Davies | Boston University, Graduate School of Education |
| Susan Swap | Wheelock College |

**Working Meetings on Parent Involvement** were held in November, 1988 with teams of principals, teachers and parents from twenty-one communities. These teams shared strategies and program ideas related to home-school communication and outreach to "hard-to-reach" parents. Many of the ideas and cautions raised by the over one-hundred representatives of these communities have been incorporated into this publication. Participating communities included:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Attleboro | Lawrence | Swampscott |
| Auburn | New Bedford | Taunton |
| Brookline | Northboro | Uxbridge |
| Cambridge | Pittsfield | Waltham |
| Concord | Sheffield | Watertown |
| Easthampton | Somerville | Westport |
| Fall River | Springfield | Worcester |

We also are very appreciative of the contributions of Virginia de Mello and Louise Lunde who patiently produced successive drafts of this booklet and Barbara Libby who worked on developing some of the strategies and helped with editing.

## A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement in schools does not just happen.

- It takes commitment on behalf of school staff.
- It has to be planned and thoughtfully implemented.
- It takes cooperation and coordination.
- It takes outreach to parents to determine their interests and needs.
- It takes time, energy, and creativity.

Parent involvement programs will be successful only if they are designed with an understanding of parents' needs and respect for the differences among parents. The parent population of a school may have a broad range of attitudes toward schools that are based on:

- Their own experiences with schools.
- Their expectations for the school.
- Their linguistic and cultural comfort in interacting with teachers and school administrators.
- The time they have available to participate in school programs.
- The value they place on education.

Parent involvement programs should reflect and accommodate the range of individual situations that exist among the school's parents. School administrators and teachers are encouraged to develop programs that address the differing needs of parents and that assist them to be supportive of the school and of their children's learning.

## FIVE CATEGORIES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

In planning for parent involvement in education, schools are encouraged to develop a diverse range of approaches that reflect the many ways in which parent can be involved:

1. **Home-school communication**

   Communication is the foundation for all other parent-school activity and involves one and two way exchanges of information such as newsletters and handbooks, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, school meetings, and telephone calls.

2. **Parents as supporters**

   There are many ways in which parents can support the school and their children's learning such as attending school events; organizing school events; talking with children about homework assignments; and providing enrichment opportunities for students (museum visits, etc.).

3. **Parents as teachers**

   Parents, who are children's first teachers, can play an active role as "teachers" at home and in school through activities such as assisting children with math; reading with children at home; in-school tutoring; and volunteering to share information and skills with students in school.

4. **Parents as learners**

   Schools can provide parents with a range of learning experiences such as workshops on child development; meetings to explain special programs at the school; workshops on at-home learning activities for young children; and English, math, science, and computer literacy programs.

5. **Parents as advisors and decision makers**

   Schools are expanding the ways in which they are including parents in educational decision making and planning through activities such as soliciting parent input on and involvement in curriculum and program development; including parents on personnel search teams; and involving parents in determining school policies.

By planning a comprehensive approach to parent involvement that is targeted toward all of these areas, schools will increase their ability to reach and involve larger numbers of parents.

## BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Many societal, economic, and demographic factors have combined, in the 1980's, to reduce parent involvement in their children's education and parent participation in schools. These factors are likely to intensify in the decade ahead and present challenges and barriers to parent involvement planning.

- Parents have less time and energy for volunteering in schools and serving on committees that provide support to the school.
- Two working parent families may have difficulty finding the time or energy to attend school events and to assist children with homework.
- Single parents may have child care responsibilities that prevent them from participating in school programs.
- Teenage and other young parents may not have finished school and may be resistant to reentering school settings and unable to assist their children at home.
- Some children live in homes in which they receive minimal parent supervision and support.
- Some parents are under extreme pressure from economic, interpersonal, and other stresses; their own needs are taking precedence over the educational needs of their children.
- Some parents may not have the skills or information necessary to support their children's learning.
- Parents with negative attitudes toward their own schooling may not be interested in becoming involved with their children's schools.
- Parents with non-majority cultural and linguistic backgrounds may be uncomfortable in the school setting and unable to read communications from the school.

Schools planning parent involvement programs are urged to take into account the barriers that may prevent parents from being more active participants in their children's learning experience. To overcome these barriers, schools can:

- Be creative and flexible in their scheduling and programming.
- Develop approaches that enable parents to support their children's learning at home, in the community, and at the school.
- Take new approaches to parent conferences, report cards, and other communication with parents.
- Operate in non-traditional timeframes and locations.
- Develop partnerships with community-based organizations to reach parents through those organizations' established ties.
- Make special efforts to address the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of parents.
- Develop programs and services for parents that are **school-based** and **community-based** in order to reach and involve a broader spectrum of parents.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPENDIUM

This compendium provides 73 programmatic approaches for involving parents in their children's education. While not all approaches will work for all schools, they do demonstrate the broad range of ways that principals and teachers are communicating with parents and working to help them support their children's learning.

These strategies are organized with six categories: the five approaches that correspond to the roles parents can play and a sixth category,

"Support Systems," that describes ways in which schools can be assisted as they work to expand parent involvement in education. They include more and less traditional strategies for reaching out to and involving parents. We hope this book will stimulate school staff to enrich their existing parent involvement practices and will stimulate the creation of new approaches.

If you would like to share approaches you have tried that are not listed here, or would like additional copies of this booklet, please contact:

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**PARENTS INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES HAVE BENEFITS FOR:**

Students in all grades

Adults in Learning Centers

Students with special needs

Occupational Education students

Gifted and Talented programs

Chapter 1 programs

Bilingual students and parents

Urban, rural, and suburban parents

Minority and majority parents

## PART ONE

## HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Schools that want to strengthen parental involvement can begin by reflecting on ways in which they communicate with students' families and on the effectiveness, sensitivity, and appropriateness of this communication in initiating and nurturing parental involvement.

Effective home-school collaboration involves broadly defining school needs and learner needs and creating ways to involve parents in supporting these needs. This section describes traditional and time-honored modes such as parent and teacher conferences, open houses, and newsletters; provides suggestions for maximizing the impact of cable and telephone technologies; and offers ideas for reaching out to parents through involvement with community-based organizations and leaders. In all of these strategies, there is a strong emphasis on involving teachers and parents in planning for and implementing these approaches.

## STRATEGY NO. 1: HOME-SCHOOL HANDBOOKS

### PURPOSE

To provide parents with a handy, "all-in-one-place, user-friendly" information packet about the school and the roles that parents can play in the school. Handbooks support parent involvement by increasing parents' understanding of school policies and programs and awareness of the many different ways they can be involved in the school.

### DESCRIPTION

A home-school handbook serves as the school's calling card, establishing a tone for its relations with its parents. It also serves as a "Parents' Yellow Pages" providing all of the basic information they need. Handbooks can contain the following :

- Statement of school goals and philosophy.
- Discipline policy and code.
- Operations and procedures with respect to:
  - grades and pupil progress reports
  - absence and tardiness
  - snow days
  - transportation schedules and provisions for after school activities, etc.
- Special programs at the school.
  - after-school enrichment programs
  - school-age child care programs
  - other special activities
- Parent involvement policies and practices at the school, with items that describe:
  - a parents' "Bill of Rights"
  - a parents' "Code of Responsibilities"
  - open-houses/parent-teacher conferences
  - involvement opportunities such as volunteer programs, SICs and other advisory councils, PTA/PTO's
- A calendar of major school events throughout the year: holidays, vacations, regular PTA meetings, report card periods, open-houses, and other regularly scheduled school-home events.
- Names and phone numbers of key contact people.
- A tear-off response form allowing parents to ask questions, voice concerns, and volunteer at the school.

The handbook could be distributed to all parents at the beginning of the year, at an open-house, or through the mail.

### IMPLEMENTATION

A school improvement council (SIC) grant or Horace Mann grant could provide a teacher with a stipend to coordinate the development of the handbook in consultation with the PTO/PTA or SIC. In following years, the handbook can be updated with a minimum of effort. Each year, however, the school administration should plan to provide clerical and printing assistance for the revised handbook.

#### Length

While it is tempting to include as much information as possible, avoid making a handbook too long. Materials that look too lengthy will lead parents to decide, "I will read it later when I have more time."

#### Outreach to hard-to-reach parents

In schools with significant numbers of language minority parents, arrangements should be made to translate the handbook into appropriate languages. Schools may also want to disseminate the handbook to community organizations that serve these populations.

The "start up" for a handbook involves a major commitment of time and the involvement of many people. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Principals can contribute information on all policies and programs that would be relevant.
- The handbook can be reviewed in draft form by teachers, parent groups at the school, student government or other student associations, and others parents and students.
- Handbooks from other schools can be reviewed for ideas.

## STRATEGY NO. 2: OPEN HOUSES

### PURPOSE

Inviting parents to an Open House at the school is one of the most successful and cost-effective ways for schools to share information about their programs with all parents.

### DESCRIPTION

The activities at an Open House can include:

- A welcoming session, led by the principal, that provides an orientation to the school's philosophy and introduces the teaching staff.
- A tour of the school.
- Time for parents to meet in their children's classrooms and hear about the year's curriculum and teachers' expectations.
- A chance to meet and talk with the children's teachers.
- A chance to socialize with other parents.

Open houses can also include an opportunity for teachers to:

- Demonstrate some of the activities which will take place in their classroom through slide shows or photo essays from past classes.
- Communicate about the kinds of assistance and support they would like from parents.
- Give parents a chance to ask questions about the upcoming school year.

### IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Timing**

   Open houses should be held only once or twice a year and scheduled at times of low calendar conflict. It is best to hold them about a month after classes start so that the beginning of the year "dust" can settle, teachers have some familiarity with their students, and there is time to engage in the parent outreach that will be critical to the success of the open house.

2. **Parent involvement in planning**

   Open houses are successful when they meet a real need for parents. The best way to insure that the open house will address significant needs is to involve parents in the planning process. A committee composed of parents, teachers and administrators can design an open house program that will be relevant to parents of new and continuing students.

3. **Publicity**

   The most important element in successfully involving the maximum number of parents is to set an expectation among all students that their parents will attend. Some publicity strategies include:

   - Having students design personalized invitations to the event for their parents.
   - Mailing every parent an invitation from the school which explains in detail the event and what parents can expect to learn.

- Indicating on the invitation the transportation and childcare arrangements that the school will provide.

- Hanging posters, created by classes of students, in local grocery stores, banks, and the public library.

- Setting aside time for teachers and parent volunteers to call all parents, particularly parents of new students, a day or so before the event to personally invite them.

- Using the loud speaker to remind all children on the day of the event that school staff are eager to meet their parents that evening at the open house.

4. Considering parents' needs

   A checklist of considerations:

   - Have announcements been sent out in languages other than English if appropriate?

   - Are support staff available to provide directions to parents?

   - Will there be translators on hand for parents whose language is not English?

   - Are there arrangements for childcare? For transportation?

5. Keeping it in focus

   In all information about the open house and in the principal's greeting, it should be emphasized that the open house is not the time or place for discussion of individual children's progress or problems. These issues are best dealt with in parent-teacher conferences or other personal communication.

## STRATEGY NO. 3: SECONDARY LEVEL COURSE OUTLINES FOR PARENTS

### PURPOSE

To provide an information base that supports increased involvement of parents of secondary school students in their children's learning and in the school.

### DESCRIPTION

At the elementary level, most parents have a general sense of the material their children are learning. At the secondary level, it may become increasingly difficult for parents to stay informed about what is happening in the classroom. Parent information packets built on a course outline help parents to keep updated on their children's curriculum and to reinforce these topics with their youngsters.

A packet may include the following:

- Course title and a short description of the course.

- Objectives for the course stated in terms such as:

  "By the end of this course, students will know about ___ and will be able to do ___."

- Course outline that includes:

  - sequence of topics to be covered
  - dates of major exams
  - description and dates for term papers and special projects
  - the major texts to be used

- Grading policy.

- Homework policy with a statement of expectations and information on anticipated amount of time that should be spend on preparation.

- Related reading materials that parents may encourage their children to use, such as easily accessible books, periodicals, etc.
- Relevant television programs such as regularly scheduled science or current affairs documentaries.
- Access to the teacher, including phone number and office hours, if any.

IMPLEMENTATION

This approach does not require a great deal of additional time and resources, as ninety percent of the suggested packet contents are usually already prepared.

Sample packets which other teachers can use as a model can be developed during an inservice session. While primary responsibility rests with the individual teachers, the school administration will need to provide clerical assistance for typing, reproducing and mailing. Secondary schools report that the most successful strategy for getting materials to parents is to mail them directly to the home.

## STRATEGY NO. 4: FAMILY/SCHOOL NIGHT IN A COMMUNITY SETTING

PURPOSE

To build positive relationships between parents and school personnel in a non-threatening, informal environment.

DESCRIPTION

Family/School Night in a community setting can be a useful beginning activity for building parent involvement. Several such gatherings can be implemented during the school year.

The first event should be exclusively social so that parents, teachers and students can relax in a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere. Family/ School Night can be adapted to any community facility -- a family movie at the VFW hall, a multiethnic festival at the local church, a Mother's Day picnic at the town pool. Invitations and outreach to parents should highlight the fact that school staff will actively participate.

Subsequent Family/School Nights can be designed to reflect parents' input and interest and might include a speaker, a program presented by the children, or a discussion followed by family activities around topics such as:

- Helping children to learn responsibility at home and at school.
- Time management for teachers, parents, and students.
- Ideas for parents to help students strengthen their study skills.
- Effective ways to help students with homework.

Family/School Nights can also be organized by grades and parenting issues such as:

- Getting ready for kindergarten.
- Preparing for transitions (middle school, high school).
- Making choices and selecting courses in high school.
- Preventing substance abuse.

IMPLEMENTATION

Parents who demonstrate interest can be asked to take a visible, leadership role in planning and carrying out these programs. This project could also be adopted by constituent groups such as

school improvement councils, the PTO's or Chapter I advisory councils. Teachers interested in organizing or implementing these activities could be compensated through Horace Mann stipends.

## STRATEGY NO. 5: FAMILY/SCHOOL NIGHT IN A FAST FOOD OR OTHER BUSINESS SETTING

### PURPOSE

To build positive relationships between parents and the school with the support an or sponsorship of a local business.

### DESCRIPTION

Family/School Night can be held in collaboration with any business that wishes to sponsor such an event such as a fast food restaurant, a community newspaper, or local bottling plant. Family/School Night at a business site can involve a variety of activities for parents, students, teachers, and administrators that are specific to the particular business setting. Students and teachers can plan activities as part of a class project. For example, each business site can offer a tour of its facilities. Families and school personnel can be organized in small tour/discussion groups. Topics for discussion during the tour may include: how a fast food restaurant orders and stores supplies, how the local newspaper is published, or how a bottling company managers the assembly line and distribution process. The business may be willing to provide light refreshments. Everyone can participate in the task of preparing or serving food. At a fast food restaurant, adults and students can switch traditional roles -- students can be the chefs and parents and teachers can serve as waiters or as part of the cleanup crew.

### IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel, students, parents and business people can all play a role.

Teachers and students can:

- Survey the community for ideas or suggestions for Family/School Night activities.
- Contact merchants; discuss and evaluate possible sites and activities.

Parents may:

- Help with program publicity.
- Organize a phone tree to help with outreach.

Merchants may:

- Advertise Family/School Night.
- Offer discount coupons, samples of products, or food.

In return, school personnel should provide recognition and notes of appreciation for sponsorship of and contributions to a successful Family/School Night.

## STRATEGY NO. 6: PERSONALIZED WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

### PURPOSE

To reinforce the message that parents have an important role to play in their child's education and in the life of the school. Personalized interactive written communication also provides classroom teachers and other school staff with valuable information about individual pupils. Personalized communication can strengthen parents' roles as "supporters" and "teachers" of their children.

DESCRIPTION

There is a wide variety of personalized written communication approaches that schools have found effective.

1. **Teacher-Grams/Half 'n' Half Letters** - A postcard or single page form on which teachers can inform parents about some special achievement or effort their child has made. Space at the bottom of the "gram" or letter is provided for parents to comment on the message or raise an issue that is of concern to them. It is important that the format of the Teacher-gram or the Half 'n' Half Letter provide parents with the option to engage in "two-way" communication.

2. **Half 'n' Half Pupil Progress Reports** - An extension of the parent-teacher grams and Half 'n' Half Letters. The Half 'n' Half Pupil Progress Report extends the concept of two way communication to the practice of report cards. Teachers complete the top-half of the report and parents are invited to respond with comments, questions, and additional information about their child on the bottom half.

3. **Family Information Forms** - At the beginning of the year, parents can be invited to respond to a survey which solicits basic information needed for school records: emergency phone numbers; etc. These surveys can also ask parents about their own areas of expertise, interests, and skills, inviting parents to indicate ways they might like to share their knowledge and ability with school children as volunteers or resource people.

4. **Welcome Letters to Parents** - Teachers can send families a welcome letter, at the beginning of the year, or when new students join a classroom. A welcome letter can include an overview of the goals and programs of the class, a phone number and time when the teacher can be reached, an invitation to parents to be in communication with the teacher, and an offer to provide assistance to parents as they help their children with school work.

5. **Friday Folders** - A vehicle for keeping parents updated on the work that their children are doing in school. Folders, which are sent home to parents each Friday, contain children's graded work for the week and a comment/question sheet that is signed by parents and returned the following Monday. This approach is especially useful in the upper elementary grades.

IMPLEMENTATION

School administrators should acknowledge the additional time and effort that teachers invest in these activities. In addition, school administrators will need to provide materials, postage, and clerical support for teachers.

All written communications must be translated into the languages of parents who lack literacy in English. Schools may want to recruit parents or older students to assist in the translation process.

If translation is needed but not possible, schools should make contact with community based agencies that can provide assistance.

## STRATEGY NO. 7: NEWSLETTERS

PURPOSE

To provide a steady stream of information from the school to the home.

DESCRIPTION

As their name implies, newsletters provide readers with "news" in an informal "letter" style. Their function is to inform, announce, interest and communicate. A newsletter is most useful when careful consideration has been given to clarifying its purpose:

o "Do we need a newsletter?"

- "Who is the audience?"
- "What do we want to communicate?"
- "How should we present the information?"

Other considerations include:

1. **Length:** Some schools have ambitious multi-page newsletters; others send out a weekly or bi-weekly one page sheet of news. In general, the frequency and timeliness of a newsletter are more important than its length and comprehensiveness.

2. **Content:** Timeliness and brevity are the hallmarks of an effective newsletter. Typical contents can include:

   - Recent accomplishments of students in academic, athletic, artistic and citizenship areas.
   - Changes in school appearance or organization.
   - New services to be offered at the school.
   - Upcoming school events, schedule changes, conference times, testing dates, etc.
   - Human interest items featuring students, parents volunteers, or staff.
   - Articles on curriculum innovations.
   - Scholarship application information.
   - Activities scheduled for parents, students, and community members.
   - After school childcare opportunities.

3. **Interactive features:** To promote two-way-communication, newsletters can:

   - Encourage parents to write letters to the editor.
   - Provide an "op-ed" column that is open to anyone from the school community.
   - Contain mini-survey questionnaires soliciting readers' opinions on a variety of topics.

### IMPLEMENTATION

In many schools, the PTA or PTO produces the school newsletter. In schools with parent liaison and outreach workers, paid or volunteer, these individuals may be in charge of editing the newsletter. In other schools, the newsletter is edited by a teacher and, especially in the upper grades, can become the project of a language arts or journalism class.

Many high schools have fairly sophisticated word processing, printing, and typesetting equipment that are used to expose students to career-related communications technology. These publishing centers can be used to produce newsletters for the school in which they are housed and for other schools in the system.

## STRATEGY NO. 8: MINI-SURVEYS

### PURPOSE

To provide an interactive form of home-school communication that sends the positive signal that parents' opinions and perspective are valued.

### DESCRIPTION

Many schools conduct periodic needs assessments. Often these assessments contain, as one of their components, a comprehensive survey of parents' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the school program. "Mini-surveys" are less comprehensive, less costly, and more frequent versions of "comprehensive" parent surveys.

Some advantages of the mini-survey are:

- It can focus on a discrete issue, e.g., homework policy.
- Because it is short, the responses can be tallied easily, providing quick feedback to parents.
- This quick feedback provides parents with the feeling that their input is being taken seriously.
- Because it is possible to conduct several mini-surveys during the school year, there is an ongoing flow of two-way communication.
- The short length of these surveys increases the likelihood that parents will return them.
- Parents can be given an opportunity to provide multiple choice and "open-ended" answers.
- School staff have the opportunity to get information from parents on a variety of topics.

These mini-surveys, generally only 1-page long, can be distributed in a number of ways:

- As a tear-off page in a school newsletter.
- As an insert in Pupil Progress Reports.
- As a hand-out during an Open House, Parent Teacher Conference night, or other school events.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Mini-surveys are most cost-effective when included in a school newsletter. The school newsletter can disseminate the mini-survey, report survey results, and indicate how the information will be used. School staff will find that timely feedback will increase the likelihood of parents' participation in future surveys.

For more detailed discussion of questionnaire construction, please consult **Needs Assessment: SIC Process and Practices**, available from the Office of Community Education at the Massachusetts Department of Education, (617) 770-7502.

## STRATEGY NO. 9: SCHOOL COLUMN IN THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

### PURPOSE

To help schools share information with parents and with the community at large.

### DESCRIPTION

A school column in a community newspaper can be a very effective tool for capturing parents' interest and building community support for the school.

Community newspapers are often willing to do articles on a regular basis that focus on the local schools. Administrators and teachers can support this interest by planning for and inviting coverage of special projects, schoolwide events, and activities in individual classrooms. Teachers and students can also contribute articles. Topics might include:

- Upcoming field trips and schoolwide activities.
- School plays and performances.
- Curriculum units for the coming month.
- Profile of a "volunteer of the week."
- An interview with a classroom mentor.
- Highlights of students' accomplishments (e.g., winners of the science fair, team members that qualified for a regional math competition).
- Acknowledgement of business contributions to school activities and programs.

Teachers and administrators can initiate columns for parents which can become part of an on-going series of articles. Some parents may wish to participate directly: a column written by and for parents can help to build interest and increase parental support and involvement in a wide range of school activities.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Community newspapers frequently assign a staff person to cover educational topics. A school district should contact the local editor to find out if there is such a staff person. If the paper does not have a permanent contact person, the school can select someone to identify, write, and coordinate the material which will be submitted to the paper. This project could be undertaken by a teacher receiving Horace Mann funds, a school volunteer, the advisor to the school newspaper, students in a class on journalism, etc. Additional steps to implement this strategy include:

- o Creating a teacher-student committee to collaborate with the newspaper and to develop ideas for articles.
- o Working to ensure equity across grade levels, schools, programs, etc., in the articles submitted.
- o Asking for occasional photos to accompany articles.
- o Establishing deadlines and procedures for preparing copy in the format required by the newspaper editorial staff.

## STRATEGY NO. 10: POSITIVE PHONE PROGRAM

## PURPOSE

To establish a positive climate between the home and the school by providing parents with "good news."

## DESCRIPTION

Imagine the impact on parents when they receive phone calls letting them know how much progress their children have made in reading in the last three weeks or asking if they need any information about school programs and expectations. Home-school communication is greatly increased through personalized positive telephone contact between teachers and parents. When a telephone call from school carries information that is positive, the atmosphere between the home and the school is improved.

To be most effective, a positive phone program should be structured so that over the course of the school year every parent receives at least two or three positive phone calls.

It is useful to develop a general approach for making these phone calls. This approach can outline several topics or options from which teachers can select when making phone calls, such as:

- o Introducing the teacher to the parent.
- o Telling the parent about the child's curriculum.
- o Commenting on the child's progress.
- o Informing the parent of a particular achievement of the child, such as having been selected "Student of the Week."
- o Informing the parent of particular strengths of the child and sharing an anecdote that involves the child.
- o Inviting the parent to open houses, conferences, and other school functions.

## IMPLEMENTATION

While simple in concept, the "positive phone program" does require time and effort to implement. Most importantly, it requires strong support from school administrators, who must

provide teachers with the time and resources they will need to implement this program. In addition, teachers should be involved in the planning to ensure their commitment to making the program effective.

Since many parents work during the day, teachers may need to contact parents in the evenings or on weekends. Teachers will need to have some accommodations made in their work schedules to compensate them for implementing the program during evening hours or on weekends.

In order to gain commitment from teachers, schools must be willing to:

- Make time available to staff: Positive telephone calls can be carried on during selected months of the year. During these periods time can be made available for teachers to take on this extra responsibility.
- Provide a proper facility: The program will not succeed unless teachers have a private and comfortable place from which to make their calls. Schools may need, therefore, to install additional telephone lines in lounge areas.
- Provide translation services for parents, as needed.
- Provide a reporting system: Teachers should maintain log books or calling cards so that the school has a record of positive phone calls. In this way, teachers and administrators can have a clearer sense of the scope and effectiveness of their efforts on a schoolwide basis.

## STRATEGY NO. 11: DIAL-A-TEACHER

### PURPOSE

To expand the interaction between the school and the home with a friendly, interactive, immediate, and satisfying form of communication.

### DESCRIPTION

Teachers and/or administrators set up regular call-in hours on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. During these times, parents can call the school to discuss, with school personnel, specific questions or concerns. The "call-in" hour/hours can also be used to provide general information about school events, programs, and policies.

A school might consider installing an automatic telephone answering machine. This device would provide parents with a means to communicate with the school 24 hours a day/seven days a week. Parents can leave a message -- a question or a suggestion -- at any time and can expect to be contacted within 24 hours during the school week. The answer tape can also function as an electronic newsletter by providing messages about upcoming school events.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The first consideration is time and staffing: who is going to be responsible for responding to the telephone calls? For how long? On what kind of rotation basis? Some release time or re-structuring of non-routine responsibilities will be needed for administrators and/or teachers to make this service possible.

There will also need to be a standard protocol -- a procedure and ground rules for responding to general questions about the school and for making referrals to the proper person(s) regarding child-specific concerns and questions.

A call-in program may require an additional phone-line as school phones are often very busy, especially at the beginning and end of each school day, when it would be most feasible to free up staff to answer the calls.

Finally, there needs to be a strategy to disseminate information about this program. Other forms of home-school communication described in this booklet can be used to let parents know when they can call in and what they can expect.

## STRATEGY NO. 12: PARENT GREETERS AT THE SCHOOL AT THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE SCHOOL DAY

### PURPOSE

To have parents, in collaboration with teachers, welcome other parents to the school.

### DESCRIPTION

Parent volunteers can be stationed at the entrance to the school during the morning arrival period and at the end of the day when children exit the building. These parents greet arriving parents and are available to provide support and information about school activities, special programs, or events. Additionally, parent greeters are available to answer questions and can translate for parents and teachers, if necessary.

### IMPLEMENTATION

A group of parents can be assigned as greeters so that no individual parent has total responsibility. A variety of schedules should be arranged so that everyone who volunteers has an opportunity to participate. Parents who are employed may prefer an early morning shift. Others may prefer to volunteer after school or for some special evening event. To facilitate scheduling, parents can be assigned by grade level (e.g., sixth grade parents in September, fifth grade in October, etc.).

School volunteers or the PTA might organize such a program, or stipends might be offered to parents from any appropriate funding source. School personnel will need to:

- Recruit parents as greeters.
- Develop a schedule for volunteers.
- Provide the parents with information on current school activities on the days they serve as greeters.
- Publicize the program at Open House, in the school newsletter, etc.
- Provide recognition for these parents volunteers at end of (or during) the year.

Students can help to promote the program. Classroom projects can include:

- Designing hats and armbands for parent greeters.
- Preparing handouts for parents to distribute.
- Creating a mural of parent volunteers greeting other parents as they pick-up or drop off their children at school for display at the school or other community settings.

## STRATEGY NO. 13: PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

### PURPOSE

To provide an opportunity for an exchange of information that supports parents in their role as teachers.

### DESCRIPTION

Parent-teacher conferences are an essential building block of home-school communication. Parents provide important perspectives and information that can be extremely valuable. Teachers need the help of parents to do the best possible job of educating every child and a conference can help parents plan an active education program for the home.

Conferences also provide an opportunity for teachers to explain the criteria and "grades" used on a pupils' Report Card. In fact, many schools

schedule conferences immediately after a reporting period. Some use the conference itself as the means to distribute Report Cards.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The following suggestions indicate ways in which teachers and school systems can maximize the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

1. **Preparation**

   - o Use inservice meetings to orient teachers to the system's goals for conferences. Brief role playing exercises can help teachers, especially new teachers, to anticipate and deal with typical parent questions.

2. **Allocate resources to make it easier for teachers and parents to participate**

   - o Allot sufficient time for teachers to conduct conferences and provide substitutes if teachers need additional time.
   - o Provide child care services.
   - o Arrange translation services and let parents know that they are available.
   - o Develop a flexible conference schedule that will provide options for working parents and parents who have more than one child in the school.

3. **Involve parents in preparing for the conference**

   - o Contact parents well in advance to arrange the conference.
   - o Send parents a conference planning sheet which outlines a set of questions they may want to ask of teachers.

4. **Enhance communication during the conference**

   - o Prepare a conference folder with samples of children's work and a list of the teacher's concerns and questions.
   - o Establish rapport with the parents. Develop a relationship with parents by asking them about their work or about an interest you may know they have.
   - o Accept parents as advocates. Provide parents with opportunities to speak about their children. Do not interpret a parent's advocacy as belligerence or as a criticism of the teacher.
   - o Indicate appreciation of the unique qualities of each child. Research suggests that parents use a teacher's knowledge of a particular child's personality or interests as a screening device. Parents are more willing to hear a range of feedback if the teacher comments on their child's special qualities before sharing positive or negative information on the child's performance.
   - o Establish priorities. Pick one or two areas for growth and improvement so that parents are not overwhelmed.
   - o Learn from parents. Involve parents in creating solutions to problem areas. Devote at least half the conference to parents' concerns, ideas, and questions.

5. **Follow-up on the issues raised at the conference**

   - o Close the conference with some action steps. Identify concrete suggestions for how the parents and the teacher will help the child. Emphasize the parents' role in the education of the child.
   - o Keep records and document the conference for future reference.
   - o Follow-up the conference with a phone call or a note to indicate commitment on the teacher's part.

## STRATEGY NO. 14: HOME VISITS

### PURPOSE

To signify the school's willingness to involve parents in their childrens' education. Home visits give parents a clear message that the school is caring and concerned.

### DESCRIPTION

Home visits provide opportunities for teachers to demonstrate their interest in their students' families and to gain an insight into their students through seeing them in their home environment. These visits do not substitute for parent-teacher conferences and should not be used to discuss children's progress. They are valuable when they build interest and involvement of parents in their children's education.

### IMPLEMENTATION

1. **A labor intensive program**

   Teachers' schedules will have to be adjusted to give them the time they will need to implement this program. Schools have used a variety of approaches to freeing up teachers:

   - o Reorganize school schedules to accommodate home visits.
   - o Double up classes for a set period of time.
   - o Hire substitutes to provide teachers with time.

2. **Who does the visiting?**

   To the degree possible, teachers should visit homes of children in their class. If this goal is impractical, the principal should ensure that every home that requests a home visit receives one.

   If teachers do not speak the parents' language they should be accompanied by someone who can serve as a translator.

3. **Timing and scheduling**

   Successful programs have found that it is better to schedule visits in a selected month of the year than to stretch them out over the school year.

   Some schools have scheduled home visits in the afternoon immediately after school dismissal. Others have found that early evening is more convenient for parents.

   Teachers should be allowed flexibility in their scheduling during the targeted program dates.

   Teachers of siblings may collaborate to schedule concurrently their visits to these children's homes.

4. **Making parents feel comfortable**

   Send a letter home to parents explaining the desire to have teachers make informal visits to all students' homes. This letter should include a form that parents can mail back which allows them to graciously decline or accept this opportunity.

   The tone of the letter should try to alleviate any anxiety/awkwardness on the part of parents. For example, one school included a note which said, "No preparation is required. In fact, our homes need to be vacuumed and all of us are on diets!" This touch of humor and casualness helped to set an appropriate tone.

## STRATEGY NO. 15: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENT/TEACHER CONTACTS

### PURPOSE

To provide teachers and parents with opportunities for personal contact.

### DESCRIPTION

School have used a variety of methods for providing parents and teachers with opportunities for personal contact. Some methods bring parents into the school; other methods bring school people into students' homes. Some methods are highly structured schoolwide events; others are informal. The most common methods include the following:

1. **Orientation Tours for New Parents:** Parents of students who join the school during the school year are provided with tours of and information on the school.

2. **Informal Drop-in Hours:** In some schools, principals have set aside hours when, without an appointment, they will meet with parents who wish to drop-in on the schools. The schedule for such drop-in hours can be publicized in a school newsletter, handbook, or other materials that are sent home.

3. **Monthly Parent-Teacher or Parent-Child Luncheons:** Integrated into the regular school lunch period, these monthly or bimonthly luncheons provide parents an opportunity to share lunch with their children, teachers, and other parents.

## STRATEGY NO. 16: RESTRUCTURING THE SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTING AND ORGANIZATION

### PURPOSE

To facilitate parent involvement in the secondary school by reducing some common obstacles that stem from the physical layout and organizational structure of the secondary school.

### DESCRIPTION

The physical layout and organization of secondary schools can present barriers to parent involvement. One set of obstacles stems from the sheer size and lay-out of many secondary schools making them less than "visitor friendly."

Schools can become more visitor friendly by:

- Placing clearly marked signs on the exterior of the building indicating the entrance (some secondary schools consist of several buildings, all of which look alike, with no recognizable front door).

- Instructing guards or other supervisory personnel to welcome parents who enter the building and assist them in finding their way.

- Creating a welcome sign or display cabinet for parents in the entryway.

Another impediment to parent involvement is students' schedules, which place them in contact with many teachers. Parents can find it difficult to know which teacher to contact or whether to contact them all. Rarely does any one staff member have a complete picture of each student, except for the guidance counselor, whose heavy case load may include more than 100 students.

Some secondary schools are reorganizing in ways that increase teachers' ability to form relationships with parents and students. Secondary schools can encourage parent involvement by:

- Creating administratively smaller units within the school through "clusters," "houses," and other organizational devices.
- Maintaining continuity of counselors throughout the high school years so that students have an ongoing relationship with at least one individual at the school.
- Creating teams of teachers who stay with students for more than one year.
- Scheduling periods for teaching teams to meet:
  - With each other to discuss students they all teach.
  - With parents and students to build continuing relationships between the school and parents.

## STRATEGY NO. 17: VIDEOS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES THAT INCREASE HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

### PURPOSE

To expand the interaction between the school and the home through the use of new technologies.

### DESCRIPTION

Electronic media, such as videos, provide additional opportunities for immediate and interactive communication between the school and the home. Today's working parents often do not have the time to visit and observe their children's school or classroom or to attend school performances and events.

In order to help capture a sense of the classroom and the school, one school in Massachusetts used part of its school improvement council grant for equipment to videotape interesting events in its classrooms. Video tapes such as these can record a whole group lesson, a dramatic presentation, a class project, or some other special event. Families can borrow these tapes to view on their VCRs at home.

Another school in Massachusetts used a video to increase parent attendance at its "Open House." The videotape included footage of major events at this school -- an installation of a space lab, an honors brunch, sports awards, a science fair, as well as classes in session. The video was shown at the PTO meeting and at the Open House.

Schools which have Parents Resource Rooms (See Strategy No. 40) can keep a library of videos that can be borrowed by parents.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Easy access to equipment is a must for this strategy. In addition, staff, parents, or others will be needed to record the major events at the school and edit the final product. Students in high school and junior high video clubs can be asked to film and edit school and classroom events. If appropriate, schools may consider providing videotapes in the languages of language minority parents.

## STRATEGY NO. 18: IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH LANGUAGE MINORITY PARENTS

### PURPOSE

To promote greater integration of language minority parents and their families into the life of the school.

### DESCRIPTION

Involving non-native English speaking parents in their children's education can present special

challenges. Communicating with these parents whose primary language is not English will take sensitivity, time, and effort. Some of the strategies that have proven successful include the following:

1. Translating written materials such as letters, progress reports, school handbooks, calendars, information packets, etc., into the languages of all parents who have children at the school.

2. Ensuring that there are individuals available to answer the school telephone who speak the languages of parents.

3. Developing linguistically-appropriate newsletters for bilingual parents or producing bilingual newsletters which include translations of newsletter articles.

4. Using schools' newsletters to make announcements of cultural events, etc., sponsored by bilingual groups represented in the school.

5. Integrating bilingual/multicultural materials in school displays, printed materials, publications, libraries, and classrooms.

6. Using paid or volunteer interpreters to promote communication with language minority parents whose ability to communicate in English is limited.

7. Sponsoring cultural events that involve language minority students, their parents, and the larger community.

8. Inviting language minority parents to be resource experts on their cultural heritage in connection with cultural events that celebrate a community's ethnic heritage. Teachers can integrate specific cultural learnings into the curriculum by inviting parents to make presentations and to undertake projects within the classroom. Activities could include cooking classes, celebrations of holidays, craft fairs, international dinners, etc. These invitations to play an "expert" role can demonstrate the school's interest in making the school a friendlier institution to language minorities.

9. Hiring bilingual parent coordinators to meet with parents in their homes and at parent centers, churches, and other gathering places to talk about school-related issues.

10. Recruiting, training, and hiring bilingual parents to be paraprofessionals in the schools.

## STRATEGY NO. 19: COMMUNICATING WITH AND INVOLVING SINGLE AND WORKING PARENTS

### PURPOSE

To help remove as many barriers as possible to the involvement of single and working parents.

### DESCRIPTION

An increasing number of children in our schools live in single parent families, step-families, foster families, and other non-traditional family configurations.

Communication with single-parent and other non-traditional families will be more effective if schools:

- Avoid making the assumption that students live with both biological parents.

- Avoid the traditional "Dear Parents" greeting in letters and other communications; use "Dear Parent," "Friends," or some other form of greeting.

- Develop a system of keeping non-custodial parents informed of their children's school progress.

- Demonstrate sensitivity to the rights of non-custodial parents. Inform parents that schools may not withhold information from non-custodial parents who have the legal right to see their children's records.

- Develop a simple unobtrusive system to keep track of family changes and of significant other adults in the child's life.

  Example: At the beginning of the year request information on the names and addresses of individuals to be informed about each child and involved in school activities.

  At mid-year send a verification form to each child's parents and/or guardian(s) to determine that the information is still accurate and current. Invite the parents/guardians to indicate any changes.

- Place flyers about school events on bulletin boards of major companies in the community.

The following practices can make the involvement of single and working parents in school life more feasible:

- Welcome older or younger children at parent-teacher conferences, parent organization meetings, and school events. Provide organized activities or child-care services during these events.

- Provide teachers and counselors with inservice training that helps them work with children of single and working parents. This training can sensitize them to special problems faced by these students and their parents.

- Gather information on whether joint or separate parent conferences need to be scheduled with parents.

- Sponsor after school and weekend learning activities at which parents can participate and learn with their children.

- Establish parent-run homework centers that provide children with after-school settings in which students can do their homework and parents can seek assistance in helping children with homework.

- Hold parent-teacher conferences and other school events in the evenings.

- Collaborate with local businesses that employ parents to arrange for release time from work so that these parents can spend some time at their child's school when it is in session.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Homework networks and child care can be provided by a school volunteer program, if one exists. Commonwealth Inservice Institute grants can provide for training on dealing with the changing family. School staff can also receive training from family counseling specialists at local social service agencies.

Approaches which employ different and more sensitive ways of communicating with non-traditional families do not require any additional investment in material resources.

## STRATEGY NO. 20: A TRAVELING PARENT INFORMATION VAN

### PURPOSE

To increase communication between home and school by using a traveling "parent information van."

### DESCRIPTION

An existing school vehicle can be renamed a "parent information van." The van would serve to bring information to parents by making regularly scheduled stops in the community neighborhoods. The information can include notices about school activities and events, guidesheets for helping children to develop academic skills, and handouts with tips on parenting, homework, family nutrition,

and health and safety. The van can be staffed by parent volunteers, a school outreach worker, or parent information specialist. In addition to providing information, the staff can answer questions about school practices and concerns, serve as troubleshooters, and provide referrals to other agencies. Van staff can enhance home/school communication by sharing concerns with school personnel that have been raised by parents in the neighborhood.

IMPLEMENTATION

The parent information van might be supported by a variety of sources: Horace Mann funds, Early Childhood Education grants, the PTO, a school/business partnership, or the school improvement council.

Parents need to learn about the van and its purpose. Students can help to publicize the van by making posters and banners. Local businesses can be asked to assist with publicity and sponsorship through ads, radio and television spots, and community bulletin boards. Some businesses may want to support the community's use of the van by donating coupons, coffee, or other incentives. The local gas station can offer free gas fillups for the van. Local businesses who employ parents can offer them release time to staff or visit the van. The van can be decorated with a banner that acknowledges those businesses that have provided support.

A training session should be offered to parents who volunteer to staff the van. The materials in the van should be well organized and available in all appropriate languages. The van's staff should be able to converse in the languages spoken in the community. The van's travel schedule should be consistent and well publicized so that parents know when and where it will stop in their neighborhood.

## STRATEGY NO. 21: DIRECT DELIVERY OF INFORMATION TARGETING HOUSING PROJECTS

PURPOSE

To help insure that information on school matters reaches parents directly.

DESCRIPTION

Because some information sent home with children does not reach their parents, schools may want to distribute information directly to housing projects, apartment complexes, or other neighborhood high density housing sites. A teacher-parent information specialist or parent volunteer may visit the project and interview parents about ways to help insure that they receive school information. Parents at the project may want to meet and discuss ways to improve the flow of information between home and school. Housing project managers may also have suggestions and be willing to help in this effort. Through working with housing project managers, school personnel can demonstrate their interest in communicating with parents and their willingness to develop procedures to make this happen.

IMPLEMENTATION

To implement this strategy, school personnel will need to form a relationship with the manager or custodian of the local housing project. One or more parents might be identified to work with the manager. Together they would identify a central place where notices might be posted. Additionally, they could develop a process for putting information in mailboxes, under apartment doors, or in lobbies or hallways. Parents and the building manager or custodian can evaluate these ideas to determine which are most effective.

School personnel should be sure to acknowledge the manager or custodian for his/her efforts to help the school do outreach. This acknowledgement might take many forms:

- The receipt of a public service award.
- Formal recognition from the local school committee.
- A gift certificate from a local business.
- An interview on the evening news.
- A party at the housing project.

## STRATEGY NO. 22: NEIGHBORHOOD WALKS FOR TEACHERS

### PURPOSE

To help bridge the gap between home and school by having teachers visit the neighborhood to talk informally with parents.

### DESCRIPTION

A school or class can plan a teachers' visit to the neighborhood as a classroom project. Teachers can work with students to construct a neighborhood map and identify key locations that would be convenient places to stop along the way and visit with parents. The neighborhood map may include places where families shop (stores, outlets or malls), go for emergency assistance (police station, fire station or hospital), or go for recreation (movies, bowling alleys, community playground, etc.). Parents would be informed of the date and time of the visit and invited to greet teachers at one or several of these stops in order to say "hello" and begin to become acquainted.

### IMPLEMENTATION

An individual teacher, a group of teachers at a specific grade level, or the entire teaching staff can adopt this strategy. There are rich opportunities to involve students in planning and participating in the walk, and in carrying out related activities. School personnel can:

- Create and distribute flyers to publicize the visit.
- Contact a local television station to obtain coverage as a community service event.
- Videotape or take candid photos of teachers and parents for a videotape or slides show.
- Develop a photographic essay on the neighborhood for display at the school or in the community.

Students can:

- Write letters to parents to inform them of the visit.
- Make publicity posters announcing the visit.
- Approach local merchants for space to display the posters.
- Write articles for the school paper to publicize the activity.
- Make and serve simple refreshments at one or more stops along the way.

## STRATEGY NO. 23: THE NEIGHBORHOOD SUPERMARKET OR GROCERY STORE/SATELLITE PARENT INFORMATION CENTER

### PURPOSE

To build parents' comfort with school personnel by providing a visible school presence in a neighborhood supermarket, grocery store, or other retail setting.

DESCRIPTION

Supermarkets can be asked to identify an area of the store that can accommodate a small parent information center. The parent information center can provide an opportunity for parent-shoppers to ask questions and to learn about:

- o school programs and events
- o nutrition and preparation of healthy and easy-to-make school lunches
- o reading readiness activities
- o math games
- o school transportation schedules

Parent volunteers can staff the center. The store should create a specific schedule for the center's hours of operation. The information center might be open on a year long, bimonthly, monthly, or weekly basis. If possible, staff should be available on some Saturdays or for several hours during the late afternoon or early evening. Depending upon the schedule, information center staff may provide supervised reading activities for the children of parent shoppers. The operating hours for the information center should be well publicized in the store. The center's schedule should be posted at the check-out counter or other central area.

IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel or parents can approach the manager of the supermarket to discuss the need for the parent information center and present the benefits to the store, the school, and the community. If the manager is willing, school personnel should take responsibility for planning, implementing, and promoting the information center. The steps will include:

- o Identifying materials for the center.
- o Recruiting and training volunteers to staff the center.
- o Publicizing the center.
- o Working with the store management to handle the necessary administrative details.

This strategy might be launched before registration for the new school year takes place in the Fall. The parent information center can be publicized by the store as part of its "back-to-school" shopping specials. The store may be interested in offering discount coupons to parents who visit the parent information center.

## STRATEGY NO. 24: NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCY ESTABLISHING A SATELLITE PARENT INFORMATION CENTER

PURPOSE

To provide a visible school presence in a setting where parents are comfortable and familiar.

DESCRIPTION

Many parents must spend considerable time waiting for services at social service and health care agencies. The waiting rooms of many social service agencies offer rich opportunities for sharing information with parents and for exposing children to books, educational games, and materials. A small area of a social service agency might be set aside as a parent information center and staffed on some regular basis by parent volunteers.

IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to providing information and responding to parent questions and concerns, volunteers can offer a variety of learning activities - reading aloud, spelling games, or puzzles. Parents can be encouraged to participate in these activities along with their children. If senior citizens are served by the agency, they may be recruited to help staff the

center. This strategy affords a unique opportunity for the school and social service agency to collaborate on behalf of the needs of families. To implement this strategy, school personnel need to:

- Contact the social service agency and develop a relationship with appropriate agency staff.
- Develop a plan for the parent/school information center.
- Solicit donations of toys, educational games, and materials.
- Recruit and train volunteers to staff the center.
- Implement a pilot program.
- Publicize the program throughout the neighborhood.
- Formally recognize the volunteers for their contributions.
- Recognize the social service agency for its contribution to the school's community out reach efforts.

## STRATEGY NO. 25: RADIO TALK SHOW: A FORUM FOR DIALOGUE WITH PARENTS

### PURPOSE

To give schools an opportunity to communicate with the community-at-large and to give parents the opportunity to call in questions and engage in discussion. Because of the anonymity radio provides, parents can feel free to raise any concerns.

### DESCRIPTION

Local producers of radio shows are constantly looking for programming topics - for special events or for discussion by their regular talk show hosts. Schools can work with producers to identify a wide range of interesting ideas for programming. Topics might profile a single classroom, a school, or an entire school district and could build upon the following themes:

- Supporting your child's school achievement.
- Helping your child to practice critical thinking skills.
- Choosing to discipline: how can schools and parents work together?
- Building children's self-esteem as learners.
- Ways that parents can become involved in schools.
- Time management skills: finding the time to communicate with your children.
- Schools and curriculum: What are we teaching? Why?

### IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel, PTA members, school volunteers, or members of school improvement councils may approach local producers with program ideas. The school may want to form a parent/community advisory group to identify interesting discussion topics. The station may want to invite teachers and administrators to host a show or participate in a panel discussion with parents, school committee members or local legislators. The schedule for programs should be publicized through:

- Public service announcements in the community newspaper.
- Flyers sent home in lunch boxes.
- The local community bulletin board on cable television.
- Posters displayed in the neighborhood.

## STRATEGY NO. 26: COMMUNITY CABLE TV: A FORUM TO SHOWCASE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

### PURPOSE

To communicate with parents in their homes by highlighting school programs and activities and inviting parent participation in specific projects.

### DESCRIPTION

Most local cable television companies are required to devote a number of hours per week to public service programming. School districts can make arrangements with a cable television company for regular programming access. Cable programs offer teachers and students the opportunity to demonstrate classroom projects, stage debates and performances, practice interviewing and research skills, and recruit parents for many ongoing school activities and special projects. School personnel can use cable to invite parents to contribute their skills and talents to a wide range of projects -- from those that might require carpentry and construction to those that need help with organization, publicity, and fundraising. Parents who have already contributed their talents can be interviewed on the air and publicly acknowledged for their contributions. School districts could identify "parent of the month" volunteers to whom businesses could offer prizes or other tangible rewards.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Cable television companies offer free training on all facets of programming and production. A school volunteer, parent, or teacher could take the initiative to launch this strategy. School personnel should ensure that air time is made available on an equitable basis across all grade levels and school programs. Broadening the base in this way will help to build a wide audience of parents. Each cable program should be sure to include the school telephone number and the name of a person to contact for follow-up. Other ideas to increase the effectiveness of cable-TV:

- Provide cable programs in all relevant languages.
- Provide specific examples of volunteer opportunities for parents, including time commitments.
- Involve students in producing programs.
- Highlight students in special events (spelling bees, plays, swimming meets, etc.).
- Create a series that introduces all teachers at the school.
- Survey parents to determine the programs that interest them and other issues which they would like to see addressed.

## PART TWO

## PARENTS AS SUPPORTERS

Schools that are successful in generating parent support recognize that there are many ways that parents can be supporters of the school and of their children's education. Parents can play a range of roles in the school that draw upon their interests, talents, and knowledge. Schools can facilitate and maximize this participation through comprehensive approaches to surveying and utilizing parent's abilities.

This section suggests creative approaches to assessing parent resources and encourages schools to collaborate with business employees on the development of employee release and other policies that support parent involvement in schools. It also reminds schools of the importance of providing indicators of recognition and appreciation for parents, businesses, and others who contribute to increasing parent involvement in education.

## STRATEGY NO. 27: JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENT VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

### PURPOSE

To make it easier for parents to volunteer in schools, especially in non-traditional roles. Volunteer job descriptions provide more opportunities for parents to be involved "as helpers."

### DESCRIPTION

A volunteer job description can provide a standard format for providing information about volunteer opportunities. The format can include:

- Title of the position.
- Brief description of the work needed, including:
  - what skills if any are required
  - whether the job is a one-time event or an ongoing commitment
  - the total amount of hours the volunteers will be expected to work on the project
- Contact persons name, phone number, and address.

These job descriptions could be disseminated in any number of ways, including:

- Sending them home with children.
- Mailing them to every parent at the school.
- Including them in the school newsletter and/or local newspaper.
- Public Service announcements on local radio and TV stations.
- Posting them on school bulletin boards.
- Posting them at other sites in the community frequented by adults in the school's attendance area: churches; stores; libraries; city/town halls; community centers, including senior citizen centers.

Specific and concrete job descriptions may be especially useful in attracting parents who have not considered volunteering in the school because they feel that they do not have time, talents, or information to contribute.

Schools may also want to distribute job descriptions that solicit parents for one-time or special project help:

- Parents who are willing to spend one hour sharing their civic and work experience with students.
- Parents from linguistic and ethnic minorities who can serve as consultants helping the school to plan events and programs that celebrate the cultural diversity of its student population.

Job descriptions which expand the traditional definition of "volunteering" help to breakdown two common barriers to volunteering as perceived by parents: "I don't have the time it takes" or "I don't feel I have anything to offer."

### IMPLEMENTATION

In order to develop these job descriptions, it is necessary to have a contact person who coordinates the development, dissemination, and organizing of job descriptions. This person can be a volunteer, a parent para-professional, a teacher working extra time on a stipend, or other members of the school or community. School improvement council funds can be used to pay a stipend to parents or teachers. Similarly, Horace Mann monies may be used to help fund a teachers' stipend.

Principals can take a leadership role in supporting the development of job descriptions by encouraging teachers to assess their own classroom needs to develop job descriptions for volunteers.

## STRATEGY NO. 28: PARENT TALENT BANKS

### PURPOSE

To gather, organize, and store information about parents who have volunteered to share their skills, interests, and expertise with students.

### DESCRIPTION

The process used to create a talent bank provides an excellent opportunity to publicly recognize and promote the role of the community as a rich resource in enhancing student learning. Entries in the bank consist of profiles of parents who have expressed an interest in being used as resources. Each profile contains the following information:

- Name, address, and phone numbers (at home and/or work).
- Occupation.
- Hobbies.
- Areas of special expertise.
- Ability/willingness to host a field trip to their worksite.
- Number of hours that the person could contribute.
- Specific curriculum area(s) in which person is interested.
- Preference for grade levels/age group.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This information is solicited through a questionnaire that is distributed to all parents. The questionnaire can be mailed out separately or can be included as a tear-off sheet in a school newsletter or home-school handbook.

**Example A: Using parent volunteers to enhance the class curriculum.**

One K-6 elementary school distributed a summary of specific teaching units along with their Parent Talent Bank directory.

Teachers were easily able to find volunteers who could make a contribution to the classroom and enrich student learning.

**Example B: Another school sought information about parents' talents and interests in school governance and decision-making.**

The questionnaire asks parents to indicate their skills and expertise in fundraising, long range planning, organizational change, and personnel.

Parents were then invited to participate in short-term task forces or advisory committees that utilized those skills.

## STRATEGY NO. 29: SENIOR CITIZEN CENTERS: EXPANDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT TO INCLUDE GRANDPARENTS

### PURPOSE

To strengthen grandparent involvement in schools by creating initiatives which invite the participation of community seniors.

### DESCRIPTION

Many senior citizen centers are seeking volunteer opportunities for their members. Some senior citizens are particularly interested in working directly with public schools and in spending time with students. Students and seniors can work together in several ways:

- Interviewing for oral histories.
- Mentoring in areas of special interest.
- Tutoring students and helping with homework.
- Developing projects on neighborhood renovations and architecture, etc.

The American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) is an organization for seniors which has developed a formal process to identify seniors who wish to volunteer for specific projects. AARP has surveyed its members to determine their interests, gifts, and talents and has created a Talent Bank so that individuals can be matched with appropriate volunteer opportunities. Many AARP members are interested in working with schools on a wide range of projects. School personnel can contact the local AARP chapter to identify individuals who want to volunteer.

IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel, a school volunteer, a parent, or a school improvement council member can contact the community senior citizen center, Council on Aging, or the local Chapter of AARP. School personnel should:

- Identify and match seniors with appropriate student projects.
- Help students and seniors to clarify and define the project goals.
- Arrange times and places for seniors and students to meet.
- Meet with seniors and students to review progress.
- Publicize the program in collaboration with the seniors' organization.
- Offer certificates or other recognition to seniors who participate in the program.

## STRATEGY NO. 30: RELEASE TIME FROM WORK

PURPOSE

To provide employees with release time from work to enable them to volunteer in schools or attend school programs and events.

DESCRIPTION

Companies can offer parent-employees occasional release time during the work day so that they can volunteer at the school to tutor individual students, work with groups of students, or assist with a variety of classroom projects. Parent-employees may meet a variety of school needs such as working in the library or setting up a computer program. Some parents may need to use released time to attend parent-teacher conferences or attend special school performances.

Many employees consider it a "perk" to have an opportunity to tutor, develop relationships with students, serve as a role model, and make a special contribution to the school.

IMPLEMENTATION

- School personnel approach companies in the community to educate them about the benefits of released time to both the company and to working parents.
- Parent-employees inform their child's school of their employer's participation in the program.
- The school selects a liaison to identify volunteer opportunities, contact working parents, and make the necessary arrangements for their involvement.
- School personnel provide publicity and recognition for the companies' participation.

Students help to publicize the program by:

- Writing articles for the school newspaper.
- Making video tapes of special projects that involve working parents.
- Writing to CEOs about the special contributions that parent-employees have made to the school.

## STRATEGY NO. 31: PARENT INVOLVEMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

### PURPOSE

To promote the need for and the benefits of parental involvement through a community-wide, multimedia initiative.

### DESCRIPTION

An individual school or school district can promote parental involvement through a broadly based public relations effort. The public relations effort can be large or small and can be planned as a week, month, or year long activity. The "campaign" can include: posters; local newspaper articles; public service announcements on radio and television; and a variety of outreach efforts that invite the sponsorship of local businesses, cultural institutions, and community organizations. Any business or organization can participate by offering display space. Larger businesses or organizations that are willing to devote resources may help by supporting the costs for items such as tee shirts, "parent involvement" buttons, flyers, bumper stickers, or other premiums which promote this effort throughout the community.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This strategy is open-ended and can be expanded or modified to fit the existing resources. Schools might choose to:

- Collaborate with a professional public relations firm on a pro bono basis.
- Utilize the public relations department of a local company.
- Work with student interns who are majoring in public relations or marketing at a local college or university.
- Implement a project using a high school marketing or English class.

Schools should develop a step-by-step plan which includes:

- A theme for the public relations plan.
- Identification of the specific groups the plan is intended to reach.
- Design of the public relations materials (art work, bumper stickers, ads, etc.).
- Identification of community contacts and the resources that will be needed.
- Strategies to involve students and staff in the project.
- A schedule for implementing each step of the plan .
- The names of the individuals who will be responsible for each specific activity.

## STRATEGY NO. 32: ACTIVE PARENTS CAN RECRUIT OTHERS

### PURPOSE

To provide opportunities for parents who regularly volunteer at the school in any capacity (as tutors, library aides, lunchroom helpers, etc.) to serve as role models and advocates for parental involvement.

### DESCRIPTION

A nucleus of parents who are active in the school can serve as role models who motivate other parents to become involved. These active parents can work with one another and with school personnel to build interest and enthusiasm for volunteering in others. Parents have many ways to reach out to other parents, from informal daily contact to recruiting at neighborhood to association meetings, etc. Parents have considerable credibility with other parents and can help to communicate the fact that school personnel genuinely welcome and value their involvement. Parents can begin to recruit others by:

- Bringing a friend to the PTA/PTO meeting.
- Inviting a neighbor to pair up as room mother.
- Finding a buddy to aid in the library or in the classrooms.
- Offering to drive others to school meetings or school events.
- Telephoning parents to invite them to come to parents' night at school.

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATION

School personnel or other parent leaders can offer training to help active parents become effective recruiters. For example, the school can sponsor discussion groups for active parents in which they explore ways to reach out and involve others. Participants in these discussion groups can identify barriers to parental involvement and brainstorm solutions to overcoming these barriers.

Two frequently identified barriers are parents' busy schedules and unclear expectations about the nature of the volunteer project. Administrators and teachers can address these barriers by:

- Providing parents with a range of flexible volunteer activities.
- Adapting volunteer activities to parents' drivers schedules and interests.
- Providing parents with child care in order to volunteer (other parents may volunteer to assume child care responsibilities).
- Organizing volunteer projects that parents can do at home.

As new parents volunteer, the school can organize and promote a parent volunteer corps. Each volunteer can be recognized with a certificate of welcome and publicly thanked in an awards ceremony for his or her contribution to the school.

## STRATEGY NO. 33: REWARDING PARENT VOLUNTEERS: INCENTIVES AND RECOGNITION

### PURPOSE

To give community visibility and recognition to parents who are working with their children's schools.

### DESCRIPTION

School personnel can work with local businesses to develop incentive programs that reward parent involvement in the school. Vouchers or premiums can be offered to schools whose parents have

"banked" a specific amount of hours in school support and involvement activities. A large 3-dimensional bulletin board display can feature a "bank" in which wooden disks or plastic chips can each represent a specific amount of volunteer hours (1 hour, 5 hours, 10 hours). These disks can be deposited into the bank as parents log in their volunteer time. Premiums can be marked at major intervals (1,000 volunteer hours logged in; 5,000 volunteer hours, etc.) and may be used as incentives to inspire volunteers to reach new heights in hours logged.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Develop a plan for how this project could work.
- Propose it to businesses in town.
- Request donations of merchandise or products for the premiums (e.g., a set of children's books for the library donated by a local bookstore; free pizzas for a volunteer luncheon sent from the local pizza shop; $50 worth of art materials for the arts and craft booth at the school fair contributed by the local stationary or arts store) or contributions of services (e.g., spring planting of flowers at the main entrance of the school contributed by a local landscape company).
- Ensure publicity and visibility for the participating companies.
- Plan a public event to recognize the schools in which parents have contributed the highest number of volunteer hours.
- Publicly recognize and acknowledge the contributions of the businesses by writing an article in the local newspaper or school newspaper.
- Write letters to the businesses thanking them personally for the donated service or contribution.

## STRATEGY NO. 34: ACKNOWLEDGING PARENT VOLUNTEERS: A ROLE FOR COMMUNITY BUSINESSES

### PURPOSE

Variety stores, card shops, and small businesses can help the schools to celebrate parent involvement and provide visibility and recognition within the community to parents who volunteer in the schools.

### DESCRIPTION

The following examples are offered to encourage schools and school personnel to identify local resources who can adapt, adopt, or build upon these ideas.

**Neighborhood Floral Shops**

Sponsor a "Celebrate Parent Involvement with Schools Day" and offer special flower arrangements or corsages that promote the event.

**Neighborhood Drycleaners**

In the Fall, offer "Back-to School" specials for parents who volunteer in the school. The name of the neighborhood school can be printed on the cleaning bags.

**Ice Cream Stores**

Sponsor ice cream specials (free cones, sundaes, etc.) for families of students who have perfect attendance records.

**Printing Shops**

Print calendars with school names and logo and include parent meetings and special school events scheduled for the year.

## PART THREE

## PARENTS AS LEARNERS

Many of todays' parents feel greatly challenged by the multiple demands of raising children, managing a household, and holding a fulltime job. Parents have needs that schools can help to address through a wide range of workshops, conferences, and support groups.

The first step in this process is to identify, as specifically as possible, parents interests, needs, and priority concerns. At the elementary level, schools may want to provide parents with enhanced knowledge about school policies and programs; at the secondary level, workshops may focus on academic subject matter, issues related to adolescent development, and parent support and discussion groups. Schools at both levels find it important to structured workshops to meet the needs of single and working parents.

This section describes school-based parent education opportunities and workshops for parents that are held in community settings such as adult education centers, health and cultural centers, libraries and churches. By working to address parents' information, skill, and knowledge needs, schools can help to empower parents to be stronger supporters of their children's learning.

## STRATEGY NO. 35: PLANNING PARENTING EDUCATION WORKSHOPS: AN OVERVIEW

### PURPOSE

To engage parents in the life of the school by providing them with a service that they value. This strategy can also help a school to reach hard-to-reach parents and begin to establish relationships with these families.

### DESCRIPTION

Parenting workshops help parents to be more effective as parents and respond to some of their more basic needs. Some of the topics that schools have addressed through parenting education workshops include:

- Listening to your children.
- Being an effective step-parent.
- Substance abuse prevention: how to spot the early warning signs.
- Drop-out prevention: how to tell if your child is at-risk.
- Bringing up children as a single parent.
- Study skills and how the home environment can support them.
- Being an effective advocate for your special needs child.
- "When your child becomes a parent:" coping with teenage pregnancy.
- How to talk about AIDS with your child.
- Building self-esteem in your child.
- Dealing with sibling rivalry.
- Motivation and academic achievement.
- Development milestones.
- Effective discipline and alternatives to punishment.
- How to talk so kids will listen.
- Adolescent depression and suicide.
- Stress management.
- Eating disorders in adolescents.
- The law and students' rights.

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Resources

Because existing school staff may not have expertise on some of these parenting issues, schools may want to establish partnerships with other social service agencies and recruit other resource people, including:

- **Specialists:** Physicians, lawyers, speech therapists, social workers, etc.
- **Other human services practitioners:** staff of community agencies and health clinics; members of church groups and volunteer groups; paraprofessionals.

Some schools have used school improvement council funds to hire outside workshop leaders. Others have used the Horace Mann grants to pay school staff to present or coordinate a series of parenting workshops.

#### Outreach to the Targeted Parent Populations

1. Assess the needs and interests of the parents who need to be reached.

   Evidence from pilot studies of outreach to hard-to-reach parent populations indicates that parent education events, such as workshops, are more effective in attracting parents

if they respond "to what parents want rather than what schools assume they need."

2. Consult with "key informants" about the needs of the targeted population.

   Information about parents' educational needs can be obtained from parent liaison and information workers, PTO/PTA leaders, and, if the objective is to respond to the need of hard-to-reach parents, with community service organizations, churches, and other agencies and individuals that serve the targeted populations.

3. Disseminate information about the event(s).

   Most parents can be reached through the variety of written mass communication vehicles described in this booklet.

   In order to recruit hard-to-reach minority and low income parents, announcements may need to be translated into languages spoken by parents at the school. They should also be circulated to community agencies serving the targeted audience and posted in strategic locations such as neighborhood centers, churches, supermarkets, laundromats, etc.

4. Provide support services

   Strategies that make it easier for all parents to attend include:

   - o on site child care
   - o reimbursement for child care costs
   - o facilitation of carpooling
   - o reimbursement for bus fare
   - o provision of a school bus/shuttle to the workshop

## STRATEGY NO. 36: WORKSHOPS FOR PARENTS: ELEMENTARY GRADES

### PURPOSE

To provide parents with enhanced knowledge about school policies, practices and programs.

### DESCRIPTION

Workshops for parents with children in grades K-8 may want to focus on a variety of topics including student growth and development, student academic progress, curriculum, and recommendations for home activities.

- o Individual teachers may host sessions specifically for the parents of children in their classes.
- o The school's computer specialist may run a session on integrating computer use into all classrooms and across the whole curriculum.
- o All first through third grade parents could be invited to a session explaining a revised report card that will be used in the primary grades.
- o Math teachers can present the concepts introduced in a "new math" curriculum and provide an opportunity for parents to try the manipulative math materials.
- o The school psychologist can offer a session on building self-esteem and resisting peer presure to parents of students in the sixth grade.
- o Guidance counselors run workshops for all eighth grade parents on how they can help their youngsters make the transition to high school.

### IMPLEMENTATION

- o Information on this work should be sent to parents in a timely manner with reminders sent prior to the event.

- Schools may want to offer child-care, translation, or other services that may increase parent participation.

- Parents will be most likely to attend these sessions if they directly address their need for information.

## STRATEGY NO. 37: WORKSHOPS FOR PARENTS: SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

### PURPOSE

At the secondary school level, especially, parents' learning can be a precondition to their involvement as supporters and teachers of their children. The secondary curriculum is often more complex and technical than that which parents' experienced in their own schooling. Without opportunities to be learners about the school's program, parents may feel incapable of helping their children with questions and homework and may feel intimidated about discussing curriculum concerns or issues with teachers.

### DESCRIPTION

High schools have used the following approaches to provide parents with opportunities to be learners.

1. **Parent Training in Academic Subject Matter**

   Parents may need specialized training in certain areas in order to assist their children. Some schools offer workshops for parents in specific curriculum areas so that they, in turn, can tutor their children. One school offers Saturday morning sessions on math tutoring for parents who want to help their children realize their college aspirations.

2. **"What's Next Nights"**

   Schools are finding that parents are very concerned about "What's Next" for their children after high school. Programs that address the transition to work after high school, college selection and financial assistance, and related topics can be offered to parents with children at all grade levels in the secondary schools so that planning for the future can start in a timely manner.

3. **Parent-Teacher-Student Study Groups**

   Teachers in some schools encourage parents to read books that their children are reading and hold group discussion seminars with students and parents on issues that are raised in these books.

4. **Parent Education on Adolescent Issues**

   Many schools offer workshops and educational series for parents on issues related to adolescent development. Parents are responsive to programs that offer opportunities to learn about and discuss the difficult issues of adolescence. Some innovative programs link parents' educational activities with their children's curriculum. Students, for example, work in school on issues of teenage suicide, drugs, sexuality, etc., while parents are learning how to talk with their children about these issues.

5. **Parent Support Groups**

   Schools can involve parents in school programs by recognizing parents' need to have peer support during their children's adolescent years. Many parents appreciate the opportunity to share approaches and perspectives on parenting issues. Schools hold parenting workshops for parents and offer seminars for divorced and single parents to address their special needs.

## STRATEGY NO. 38: JOINT PARENT-STUDENT WORKSHOPS AND INFORMATION SESSIONS

### PURPOSE

To engage parents more fully in their children's educational experiences and enhance parent-child communication.

### DESCRIPTION

Joint parent-student workshops and information sessions provide learning opportunities for the whole family, with parents and students enjoying the same experience. Topics and foci for such sessions can include:

- **Family math nights** - Parents and students collaborate to solve math puzzles and are given problem solving exercises that can be done at home.
- **Family computer nights** - A computer expert offers a session on new software and state of the art computer games.
- **Family Science nights** - Parents and students can work on hands-on science experiments together.
- **Community Arts night** - Parents, artists from the community, students, and teachers create art and work on projects that can be displayed in the community.
- **Family Creative Writing night** - Parents and students write and edit stories together and read their work aloud.

### IMPLEMENTATION

In order to identify issues that are of interest to both parents and students, it may be useful to survey the student and parent population.

In small schools and small to mid-size school systems, it may be more cost-effective if these sessions are held for the entire school system or for a cluster of schools.

## STRATEGY NO. 39: PARALLEL COURSES FOR PARENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENTS' CURRICULUM

### PURPOSE

To provide an opportunity for parents to be more fully involved in their children's education.

### DESCRIPTION

Parallel courses allows parents to learn the course content that is being taught to their children. These courses enhance the ability of parents to support their children's learning. Examples of parallel education courses include:

- Discussion and study groups in which teachers engage parents in reading books that their children are reading and discuss issues that are raised in these books.
- Parent education components of a new health education initiatives.
- Workshops on cooperative learning in which parents are put into an experiential setting to "feel" the difference between competitive versus cooperative learning modes.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Parallel parent education programs are most likely to be needed and well attended when the school is instituting new programs, e.g., a health education initiative or a critical thinking skills program that may be unfamiliar to parents.

## STRATEGY NO. 40: PARENTS' RESOURCE ROOM

### PURPOSE

To support the role of parents-as-learners by providing materials and a space where parents can get together with other parents and with teachers to learn how to assist in their children's at-home learning. A Parents' Resource Room can also support the role of parents-as-teachers.

### DESCRIPTION

A "Parents' Resource Room" is a place to which parents can come for educational materials and training. Resource Rooms may contain:

- Reading materials that assist parents-as-teachers.
- Games, books, and videos that parents can use with children at home.
- A paid aide who provides parents with instruction in subject areas and in using learning materials.
- A place where parents can "fill prescriptions" written by teachers for specific educational materials to be used at home.
- A "Parents' Corner" where parents can talk with other parents and teachers who come into the resource room.
- An exchange box in which parents (and teachers) can borrow or trade toys and books and can drop-off unwanted books, toys, and surplus household items that teachers can use to enhance their teaching materials.

Parents' Resource Rooms send a very positive message to parents that they belong in the school and should feel welcome in it. These rooms can be used as meeting spaces for parent groups and as lounges and "waiting rooms" for individual parents in school on other business.

### IMPLEMENTATION

A Parents' Resource Room can exist in a spare classroom or a corner of a school library. The Parents' Resource Room will need minimal staffing, either by a parent/community volunteer or a paid aide. School improvement council funds can be used as seed money for providing a stock of parenting resource materials.

Principals and central administration staff can encourage teachers to develop at-home learning activities as part of their curriculum. Principals and teachers may want to devote several sessions of professional release time to this task. The school administration also can provide clerical and printing assistance to teachers who develop materials for parents.

## STRATEGY NO. 41: EARLY MORNING OR LUNCH-TIME SPEAKER SERIES AT A BUSINESS SITE

### PURPOSE

To expand outreach to parents at their worksites. Because schools traditionally hold parent meetings in the evenings when parents are tired or may have difficulty finding childcare, seminars at the worksite can facilitate parent participation.

### DESCRIPTION

Parents who have demanding schedules are often looking for ways to balance their work lives in a way that will allow them to be good workers and effective parents. School personnel and guest lecturers can present information, offer a question and answer followup, and promote discussion groups on topics of interest.

"Early bird" breakfast meetings or a lunch-time speaker series for parents can be held at a local

company. Parents' interests should determine the content. A topic can be presented as a single session or as one in a series which relates to a particular theme. Parents of the company should be surveyed to identify their parenting concerns and to tailor the program to meet their needs.

Topics for speakers may include:

- Suggestions for Working Parents who want to Maintain Close Communication with the School
- Balancing your Work Life and Your Home Life
- Helping Your Child Develop Good Study Skills
- 5 Steps to Helping Children With Their Homework

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Contact human resource development managers or chief executive officers at local companies to design seminar series.
- Discuss topics that could be of interest to parent employees.
- Develop a series or single session seminar.
- Develop a plan to publicize the program -- within the school and at the company.
- Provide publicity and recognition.
- Evaluate the sessions.
- Discuss follow-up activities.

## STRATEGY NO. 42: PARENTING TOPICS AS A COMPONENT OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

### PURPOSE

To help parents strengthen their parenting skills as they develop their language skills.

### DESCRIPTION

The curriculum materials used in ABE and ESL programs may be expanded to include information and materials on child development, time management for families, school expectations and discipline, building self esteem, and helping students with homework. It is extremely important for the "parent-students" in adult education programs to respect their own competence as teachers of their children. These classes offer rich opportunities to help parents develop their confidence and self esteem as "teachers" through role plays, skits, and classroom discussions.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Directors of early childhood programs and curriculum coordinators in elementary schools can help to provide to adult educators background materials and resources about child development and related topics. These materials can be adapted so that they can become curriculum components that are appropriate for adult learners. School personnel can:

- Work with adult educators to help them create curriculum materials for ABE and ESL classes.
- Include practical activities such as filling out a parent permission slip for a field trip and interpreting and signing the student's report card.
- Provide opportunities for parents in these programs to sit in on their children's classes.

- Provide a list of beginning literacy activities that parents and children can do together as a family.

- Plan school programs that provide opportunity for translation or accompanying written materials in appropriate languages.

## STRATEGY NO. 43: PARENT EDUCATION THROUGH COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

### PURPOSE

To offer a variety of parent training workshops in settings regularly frequented by parents for medical support, counseling services and prenatal, infant and pediatric screening; to provide opportunities for parents to practice parenting skills that help build students' readiness for learning.

### DESCRIPTION

Parent rely upon and trust the services they receive in community health centers. By offering workshops in these centers, school personnel can help parents to gradually become more trusting of them as well. Parents can enroll in workshops with other parents whom they know and can learn in a setting with which they are familiar.

School personnel can offer ongoing workshops based upon identified parent needs such as: family reading activities; building children's self esteem; nutrition and food preparation; family management for teenage parents, etc. In addition to workshops, staff can provide information about child development, and opportunities for parents to practice their parenting skills. Staff can provide ways for parents to receive support and feedback as they practice new approaches to working with their children. Parents can try out and take home learning activities that support and strengthen their children's academic achievement.

### IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel can secure the cooperation of the director of the social agency by discussing ways in which this strategy can help both the school and the agency to better meet parents' needs. Teachers and agency personnel can collaborate on developing workshops and training activities. Additional steps that can help to implement this strategy include:

- Working with representative parents to assess needs.

- Determining convenient times and formats with agency staff.

- Identifying languages in which workshops should be conducted.

- Designing workshop materials and activities.

- Developing a public relations campaign to promote the workshops.

- Acknowledging the contributions of volunteers and the staff of the agency.

## STRATEGY NO 44: PARENTING TOPICS AS A COMPONENT OF JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

### PURPOSE

To incorporate workshops on child development and school related topics into the content and structure of formal job training programs.

### DESCRIPTION

Adult job training staff can offer training and support to parents to help them prepare for the demanding schedule of parenting and holding a job. The requirements of caring for a family as well

as performing on the job are a significant challenge for many parents, especially single parents. Workshop topics can include: time management skills, helping children with homework, self esteem for children and parents, setting limits, etc.

Job training programs might also incorporate a visit to the neighborhood school within their training modules. School personnel can welcome parents, orient them to school policies and procedures, and provide information about ways that the school can help parents prepare and cope with emergency situations such as a child becoming ill during the school day.

## IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel will need to develop a relationship with the adult educators who are offering the training programs. To implement this strategy school personnel will need to:

- Identify the needs of the parents in the program.
- Explore ways in which parents' visits to the school can be incorporated into the job training program curriculum.
- Explore, as an alternative, the opportunity for school personnel to visit the job training program to bring information to parents.
- Develop public relations for the program.
- Evaluate the program to assess its effectiveness.

## PART FOUR

## PARENTS AS TEACHERS

From the earliest years of a child's life, every child and adult interaction is a learning and teaching situation. For this reason, parents are considered to be children's first "teachers." This teaching function does not cease when children enter school; for a part of each day the influence of the home is at least as great as the influence of the school.

The strategies in this section describe a wide range of parent teaching roles. Parents' natural and spontaneous "teaching" functions can be dovetailed with school activities to maximize the positive influence of both the home and the school on academic achievement.

Parents can act as teachers of their own children by:

- Establishing a home environment that supports learning.
- Engaging in at-home activities -- games, shared-reading, shared-television watching -- that build basic skills and general knowledge.
- Reinforcing what children are learning in school through structured homework exercises.

Parents can also act as teachers of other people's children by volunteering to serve as:

- Tutors and teachers aides in the classroom.
- Mentors and role models who help integrate children into the larger world beyond the school and the home.

Finally, parents can act as teachers by sharing their work and other life-experiences with school children. This sharing enlarges children's understanding of the adult world they will be entering and enriches the school's curriculum.

## STRATEGY NO. 45: STUDY GROUPS: HELPING STUDENTS WITH HOMEWORK

### PURPOSE

To provide students with a supportive environment in which to do their homework.

### DESCRIPTION

This program provides children with an opportunity to learn to support each other academically through studying together. For parents, it provides a way to help each other through alternating responsibilities for structuring study time. This approach can be an especially rewarding outlet for parents who want to help but cannot leave the home because of other responsibilities.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Parents volunteer their homes one or two afternoons or evenings a week for groups of four to five children who get together to study. This study space makes possible the "study group." Parents who run the study group agree to have a dictionary available, possibly a snack, and to provide supervision and assistance when possible. They are also responsible for making sure that children get home safely.

This program requires a significant amount of coordination by school staff and would need to be facilitated by an in-school parent liaison, volunteer, or release time teacher. The typical implementation steps are as follows:

1. Forms are sent to parents asking them to indicate whether they want their children to be in a study group and if they would be willing to host one.

2. All parents who have expressed an interest in this idea are invited to a meeting at which the study group concept is explained. After this meeting, volunteers are recruited to host study groups and to transport children to these study groups.

3. Teachers are asked to indicate which children would benefit from being involved in study groups. (Research indicates that children who are falling behind academically are most in need of a structured homework experience and will benefit from cooperative group learning.) The parents of these children are contacted to see if they would like to participate. The children of parents who volunteered to host or provide transportation are automatically included.

4. The coordinator of the program matches the lists of participating students with the list of parents who offer to host study groups. Location is a major factor in the matching process. Students are ideally grouped in homes close to their own.

5. Study group hosts are invited to a second meeting at which teachers provide details about study group homework assignments and training on how to encourage cooperative learning.

## STRATEGY NO. 46. HOMEWORK CENTERS AT THE COMMUNITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

### PURPOSE

To increase parental involvement in providing tutorial assistance to children who do their homework at the public library.

### DESCRIPTION

Many schools send students to the public libraries to gather information for research reports, homework assignments, and long-term independent study projects. In addition, many libraries report a large number of "latchkey" children who arrive after school and stay at the library until their parents pick

them up from work. The library might offer "Homework Assistance" clubs by designating a space for a "Homework Center." Volunteers -- parents, teachers, librarians, college students, or high school students -- could provide tutorial support to assist children in doing their homework.

Parents can form staffing pools (similar to car pools) where they assume responsibility on some scheduled basis. High school students or college students with an interest in teaching could staff such a program. The students might be offered high school credit for community service or college credit as appropriate. Local businesses can offer premiums or vouchers to acknowledge the efforts of the volunteers. Book publishers and local book stores can offer a book certificate to volunteers who serve a certain number of hours.

### IMPLEMENTATION

It is important that the libraries and school staff discuss the goals of the program to ensure that the library has the capacity to implement the homework center. The library would need to require that the children who come to the homework center are there for the purpose intended and not for after school supervision while parents are at work.

Volunteers can complete a checklist for each student that (1) identifies student accomplishments, (2) notes areas where students need further help, and (3) identifies where information is not available on a research assignment.

School and library staff would:

- Assess the needs of students (ages of students, academic needs, etc.).
- Establish limits for the number of students who can be served at one time.
- Recruit, train, and schedule volunteers for the homework center.
- Develop a system of feedback to and from the librarian and the teacher.

## STRATEGY NO. 47. ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO READ FOR ENJOYMENT: "IDEA TREES" AT THE COMMUNITY LIBRARY

### PURPOSE

To increase public awareness about ways that parents can encourage children to read for enjoyment.

### DESCRIPTION

Libraries are good places to display ideas that parents can use to motivate children to read regularly and to read for pleasure. School personnel and students can construct an "Idea Tree" of such successful ideas which can be placed in the children's room of the community library. Ideas for parents may include:

- Modeling a personal interest in reading at home and at school.
- Setting aside a time for children to read aloud at school and at home.
- Designating a family reading hour.
- Cutting out articles of interest from the newspaper or magazines and making a bulletin board.
- Reading recipes and writing a shopping list together.
- Reading the directions to assemble a toy or make a model airplane.

The "Idea Tree" can be a powerful way to disseminate suggestions to other parents and teachers in the community.

The "Idea Tree" may include some "empty branches" on which library visitors can write additional ideas for reading projects.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Community librarians are always interested in ways to help promote the value and importance of reading. School personnel should approach the appropriate library staff to determine interest in such a project. Teachers and administrators should then develop a plan to:

- Identify schools in the district that want to participate.
- Select schools that have strong strategies for involving parents in programs to encourage students to read.
- Construct the "Idea Tree" display.
- Determine the schedule and oversee administrative details with library staff.
- Make arrangements for transporting the "Idea Tree" to and from the library.

## STRATEGY NO. 48: YEAR ROUND HOME READING PROGRAMS

### PURPOSE

To provide a structure and an incentive for parents to assist their children in developing the habit of independent reading.

### DESCRIPTION

This strategy consists of four main components:

- High interest reading materials that children can bring home.
- A home learning booklet.
- A home reading contract.
- Prizes to motivate children to live up to their part of the contract.

Participating families receive a home learning booklet. This booklet describes the home reading program, provides parents with tips on helping to improve their children's reading, and contains information on community resources such as libraries.

The booklet also contains a reading contract. This contract, which is signed by both students and parents, signifies that students will read a certain amount of time each night (from 15 minutes to one hour depending on their reading level) from a book of their choosing. The parents' signatures on the contracts (which are renewed and signed every night) validate that these children did the agreed upon reading. If at the end of a four to six week cycle students have successfully carried out the agreement, or at least accomplished two-thirds or the reading time agreed upon, they receive the book as their prize.

Children who successfully complete several cycles receive an additional prize such as a special T-shirt or other favor.

To further motivate students, the classroom with the largest number of successful home readers can win a whole-class prize such as a special trip or a pizza party.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Fundraising by parent support groups can pay for the special prizes. Since children get to keep the books they read, the school library will have to invest in additional purchases of children's literature. These purchases could be funded by building level discretionary funds such as the school improvement council grant. A Horace Mann stipend could provide a teacher(s) with additional time to develop a home learning booklet.

## STRATEGY NO. 49: A SUMMER READING PROGRAM WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY LIBRARY

### PURPOSE

To collaborate with public libraries on community outreach to increase parent involvement in motivating students to read during the summer vacation.

### DESCRIPTION

School personnel can work with staff from public libraries to establish a summer reading program for parents and students. The foundation for the program is a contract between the teacher, the student, the parent, and the librarian. In the spring, students begin to identify interest areas and topics for summer reading. The teacher meets with each student to help construct a personal reading list. The student takes his/her reading list home and confers with his/her parents. Parents and students discuss the list and identify books for the student to: (1) read independently, (2) read with their parents, or (3) read aloud to the family.

At the beginning of the summer, the students' final reading list becomes a reading contract between the school, family, and library. The librarian could display a copy of each family's summer reading contract in the children's reading room of the public library.

In the Fall, students bring their family reading contracts back to school. Parents are invited to participate in a school celebration of each family's summer reading achievement.

### IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel can contact the neighborhood library to develop the procedures for the summer family reading program. A teacher or parent with access to desktop publishing can design an attractive reading contract and the librarian can arrange for a display area in the children's reading room.

Additional steps include:

- Helping students to identify reading interests.
- Assisting students in creating a personal reading list.
- Helping students to negotiate the reading lists with their parents.
- Communicating to parents their responsibilities for monitoring the family's reading progress.
- Arranging for a celebration at the school in the Fall to honor the accomplishments of the participating families

## STRATEGY NO. 50: PARENTS AS TUTORS

### PURPOSE

To enhance opportunities for parents to serve in teaching role.

### DESCRIPTION

Parents are trained in tutoring children in the classroom and spend several hours a week working with children one-on-one or in small groups. Some examples of how parent tutors can be used include:

- Providing one-on-one tutoring on computers.
- Helping to develop children's writing or math skills on a one-on-one basis.
- Serving as library volunteers who read aloud to kindergarten and first grade children during story hour.

### IMPLEMENTATION

A tutoring program will require coordination. This coordination can be provided by a school volunteer program, if one exists, or by a teacher on a Horace Mann stipend.

Tutors will also have to be trained. Training can be done on a classroom by classroom basis, informally, by teachers who express an interest in and a need for parent tutors. The training can also be centrally coordinated, resulting in a pool of trained tutors.

The initiation of a parent tutoring program can be preceded by a systematic survey of teachers' needs and by drawing on information in a Parents' Talent Bank (see Strategy No. 29). In this manner, schools can produce a match between classroom needs and parents' interests.

## STRATEGY NO. 51: SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT WORK AND CIVIC EXPERIENCES

### PURPOSE

To provide opportunities for working parents to be involved as role models in the school.

### DESCRIPTION

Parents in the workforce can be an important educational resource. Schools can help parents recognize that their experience provides them with an invaluable perspective from which young people can learn. Parents may share information on their profession, how they got the jobs they have, and what is involved in a particular job.

One community uses parents' civic experience sharing as part of the social studies curriculum in the eighth grade. Through a "Town Government Program," students get to know how their town works from first hand experience. Parents who work in various offices and on volunteer boards make presentations in classrooms several times each semester. This program is integrated into the children's social studies curriculum and encourages civic responsibility through presenting many options for civic involvement. Participating speakers attempt to give students the total picture of adult citizenship; they indicate that they not only work at a job but also find other ways to contribute to their communities through volunteer positions. They give students a sense of what they give to and get from their civic work.

### IMPLEMENTATION

It may be necessary for the school to make contact with parents' employers in order to secure release time for their participation.

Potential participants can be identified through the dissemination of volunteer job descriptions (see Strategy No. 27) and the development of a "Parent Talent Bank" (see Strategy No. 29).

## STRATEGY NO. 52: MORNING MENTORS: ENCOURAGING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

### PURPOSE

To provide students with weekly parent mentors from the business community.

### DESCRIPTION

Parent-employees can adopt students who need support and encouragement in order to motivate them to achieve in school. Parent-employees can serve as mentors who meet with students once a week before school to (1) check on students' homework completion, (2) hear about their academic progress in school, and (3) give students individual attention and support. A room should

be designated where parents and students can meet. Students and mentors should have some time to talk informally about students' needs and concerns. By building these relationships, students and their morning mentors will gain a sense of being partners in advancing the student's academic progress.

### IMPLEMENTATION

- Meet with the business community to discuss the program.
- Identify businesses willing to participate.
- Identify students who need additional support and encouragement.
- Recruit parent mentors from participating businesses, matching interests and strengths of mentors with the students' needs and interests.
- Designate a mentor/student breakfast to launch the program and acknowledge the participation of the businesses.
- Document and evaluate each mentor/student "connection."
- Plan and publicize a recognition event at the end of the school year that acknowledges business sponsors and parent volunteers.

## STRATEGY NO. 53: PARENTS AS CAREER MENTORS FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

### PURPOSE

To provide working parents at the secondary school level with an opportunity to play a teaching role.

### DESCRIPTION

Mentoring is teaching by example and can be undertaken through one-on-one guidance and direction of students in the mentor's workplace. A workplace can be a business, factory, office, or a community organization.

In many mentor programs, students are assigned to a mentor whose daily work most closely matches the student's career interests. During the mentorship period, the student shadows the mentor, helping with the work where possible and otherwise observing the excitement, challenges, and frustrations of adult roles in various job situations. In some mentor programs students are responsible for writing a report about the mentoring experience and they receive academic credit for successfully completing the mentoring program.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This strategy requires staff release time to develop clear and explicit guidelines for the joint responsibilities of the mentor and the student and to monitor their implementation.

Schools engaging in mentoring programs will need to contact and secure the cooperation of participating workplaces. This initial contact may lead to more extensive partnerships between schools and other institutions in the community.

Potential mentors can be identified through solicitation in a "volunteer job description" and in a survey leading to the establishment of a "Parents' Talent Bank." (See Strategies No. 27 and No. 29, respectively.)

## STRATEGY NO. 54: PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: A RESOURCE FOR PARENT MENTORS

### PURPOSE

To reach parents through their membership in professional associations and create opportunities for them to help students learn about possible careers.

### DESCRIPTION

School personnel can collaborate with many professional associations by asking their members to participate in a series of career day programs.

The school can identify a specific need to involve parents of students in these programs. Teachers, students and parents can plan these events and structure them to meet local needs.

Students can be introduced to many occupations and disciplines by inviting parent professionals to visit the schools and talk about their work. Many parents particularly enjoy being asked to share information about their professional lives. Sometimes students will want to followup and do a project with a visiting professional to further explore interest in a specific field. Some schools have built ongoing relationships with parents who want to mentor students on long term projects.

### IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel, school volunteers, or parents can contact many professional organizations to identify speakers. Examples of professional associations that school personnel can approach include:

- Massachusetts Design Architects and Planners
- Black Achievers
- Women in Engineering
- Visiting Nurses Association
- Massachusetts Bar Association
- Massachusetts Dental Hygienists
- Massachusetts Psychological Association
- American Medical Association

School personnel can help to promote interest in the project by:

- Publicizing outreach efforts to the professional organizations through the print and other media.
- Designing a flyer that can be disseminated to the professional organizations and to the community-at-large.
- Helping students to develop their interviewing skills so that speakers enjoy sharing information about their careers and work experiences.

## STRATEGY NO. 55: SUMMER HOME-LEARNING PROGRAMS

### PURPOSE

To provide parents with a structure for helping their children maintain academic progress throughout the school year.

### DESCRIPTION

Teachers have often found that students' study skills regress over the summer months. This is particularly true for students who are doing remedial work and are already one or two grades behind. A summer home-learning program has been found to be a positive intervention that provides parents an opportunity to help at a time of year they have the most time to spend with their children.

IMPLEMENTATION

Schools which have developed summer home-learning programs have found that they are successful when they incorporate the following elements.

1. **A Parent-Student Contract**

   This contract represents a formal agreement in which the parent and student consent to work on study skills over the summer. Under this contract each student agrees to spend time on a certain amount of work each day and the parent agrees to monitor this progress. A signed agreement is turned in to the school as a condition for participation in this program and in order to receive a home learning kit.

2. **Home-Learning Kits**

   The home-learning kits are prepared by a committee of teachers who represent all of the grade-levels that are participating in the program. The learning kit contains:

   - Educational materials, including flash cards and math and reading worksheets.
   - Instructions for parents on specific topics such as teaching phonics.
   - Recipes for "fun" assignments using regular domestic chores to reinforce academic skills, e.g., learning about fractions by using measuring cups of flour for making a cake.
   - A calendar with different activities for parents to do with their children for each day of the vacation, including daytrips.

3. **Follow-up and Monitoring**

   At the end of the summer, when students return to school, they turn in the kits so that teachers may check their work.

4. **Recognition and Appreciation**

   Participants can receive certificates of recognition for this extra effort.

   In one case, these certificates are awarded at a special appreciation night buffet dinner attended by the students, their parents, and the teachers who developed the learning kits.

## STRATEGY NO. 56: "MAKE-IT AND TAKE IT" PARENT WORKSHOP SESSIONS

PURPOSE

To enhance the role of parents as teachers of their own children.

DESCRIPTION

Make-it and take-it parent sessions show parents, through actual hands-on experience, how to make inexpensive learning materials that they can use with their children at home. Such sessions show parents that generally available household items can be easily used for educational games. Some of the most popular games are "kitchen games." Because many working parents are very busy and generally spend considerable time in the kitchen, these games can draw on some of the simple skills of cooking and can focus on other skills in which the children need practice. For example, children can work on math or spelling through manipulating magnetized numbers or letters on the front of the refrigerator. They can make finger puppets out of toilet paper cylinders and can use Q-tips and other household items for number games and puzzles.

IMPLEMENTATION

Participating parents can be asked to bring their own household materials to these workshops. Also, the school can set up a "recycling center" and solicit contributions of surplus materials from parents and teachers.

Prior to a "make-it and take-it" session, teachers at the school can be surveyed and asked to share examples of homemade classroom games that they have made that could be replicated at the session.

## STRATEGY NO. 57: USING TELEVISION FOR LEARNING

PURPOSE

To enable parents and students to use simple and enjoyable at-home activities that build on television programming.

DESCRIPTION

In many homes, television watching plays a major role in daily activity. Recognizing this reality, schools can follow a number of steps to harness this activity for educational purposes.

1. Communicate to parents the power of television as both a positive and a negative educational experience.

   This information can be distributed through handouts, letters to the home, or special inserts in home-school handbooks or newsletters. This topic could be addressed in parent education workshops.

2. Teachers can integrate television into their instructional program by:

   - Encouraging parents to select with their children the programs they may watch.
   - Recommending serialized or ongoing programs which parents may want to watch and talk about with their children.
   - Sending home notices about special programs that parents may want to watch with their children. These notices could include suggestions for discussing issues that the program will highlight.

## STRATEGY NO. 58: INVOLVING PARENTS IN HEALTH EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

PURPOSE

To involve parents in programs to promote family fitness through the sponsorship of neighborhood gyms or health centers.

DESCRIPTION

School personnel are frequently seeking ways to motivate students to improve their physical fitness and to incorporate new findings about nutrition and exercise into curriculum for health and physical education. Neighborhood gyms and health centers can help schools to involve parents in promoting the need for family fitness.

The school and neighborhood gym or health center can collaborate by co-sponsoring a "physical fitness" day. Teachers, parents and students can be invited to take joint exercise classes, workout with exercise equipment, and attend workshops on exercise and nutrition. School personnel can present their curriculum in physical education. Staff from the gym and health center can talk about ways that families can support and motivate student interest in exercise and skill development for a wide range of individual and team sports. A fitness plan can be developed for each family that participates. Goals can be established for each family member based

upon available time, physical fitness and interest. The plan can include participation in family sports events to be held at the school -- basketball games, volleyball, family swimming competitions, etc. Parents who have a special interest in exercise and sports may want to continue to work with students on a regular basis - coaching a school "running club" or gymnastics group or working with school personnel to sponsor a swimming meet or other sports competitions.

IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel and/or teachers should take the initiative to approach local gyms or health centers. The staff of such centers are always seeking ideas to promote the value of physical fitness and the opportunity to reach parents and students through the schools could be very attractive. The neighborhood gym or health center can be asked to:

- Cosponsor and publicize school sports competitions.
- Offer discounts on admission or free passes to the families of student winners of school sports events, such as track meets, swimathons, etc.
- Sponsor student teams in school sports competitions by donating tee shirts which promote the activity and identify the organization's sponsorship (e.g., Beaver School Volleyball Squad, Mack's Gym).

## PART FIVE

## PARENTS AS DECISION MAKERS/ADVISORS

The strategies in this section describe the many different avenues through which parents' knowledge and perspectives are brought to bear on school decisions. Parents can seek to influence decisions individually or collectively, as members of groups. As members of groups, parents may serve on all-parent committees and on committees that represent a range of other stakeholders in the school -- teachers, administrators, students, etc.

There are several reasons why schools benefit from involving parents in decision making:

- Parents are the primary clients of schools. Studies of success in business show that the firms that succeed and prosper do so, in part, because they always think of the client first. "Client" involvement in decision making will lead to increased parent support for the decisions themselves and for the school making the decisions.

- Parents have information about and knowledge of their children that is different from the knowledge held by school staff. Both parents' and teachers' knowledge of children provide vital but partial perspectives. The perspectives of parents and teachers, taken together, add up to a more complete picture of the school's students, their needs, and their potential.

- Parents bring a special source of knowledge on school decisions by virtue of their membership in various professions and occupations. These "vocational" insights can prove very valuable as schools meet the challenge of updating their programs and curriculum to keep up with the changes in the world outside.

As the strategies in this section suggest, there is no one best mechanism for involving parents in school decision making. Different mechanisms are appropriate in different contexts and schools are encouraged to assess their own situations to determine approaches that will be most effective for them.

## STRATEGY NO. 59: PRINCIPAL'S ADVISORY COUNCIL

### PURPOSE

To provide a regular forum in which school and community constituents can address issues of school policy.

### DESCRIPTION

A principal's advisory council meets on a regular basis to advise the principal on matters of school policy. A council provides the principal with a set of "key informants" who represent the views of various constituencies in the school community. The council can serve as a sounding board for new policy proposals, whether they originate from the district level or the school building.

For parents, the advisory council provides a forum in which to air concerns, react to current or proposed policies, and/or develop recommendations for new programs and policies.

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Membership Composition and Size

Representation by all key constituencies is a primary consideration for a principal's advisory council. In larger, more heterogeneous schools, this consideration may require a larger group of up to 12-20 individuals. The key constituents to include are:

- Teachers from various grade levels.
- Parents from various grade levels.
- Representatives of special interest groups (i.e., Chapter 1, Special Education, Bilingual Parents, etc.).
- Students at the secondary level.
- Representatives from community agencies or institutions that have a partnership arrangement with the school.
- A representative from the non-teaching staff, e.g., clerical and custodial.

#### Membership Selection

Both formal and informal arrangements have been used to recruit council members:

- Members can volunteer themselves for service.
- They can be recruited.
- Members sit on the council as representatives from other groups at the school. Some of these other groups at the school include:
  - PTA/PTO
  - Bilingual Parents
  - Special Education Parents
  - Booster Clubs
  - School Volunteer Program
  - Kindergarten (or pre-school program) parents

#### Structure and Functions

To aid in policy development, many councils develop ongoing subcommittees, often with additional "extended" members, that research issues, canvass other school constituents, and develop specific recommendations. In one school, the principal's advisory council has the following subcommittees:

1. A Budget Subcommittee that provides input into the annual budget making process.
2. A Personnel Subcommittee that makes recommendations about hiring guidelines and is involved in screening teaching candidates.

3. A Student Activities Subcommittee reviews and recommends extra-curricular programs for students.

4. A Communications Subcommittee is in charge of producing a home-school newsletter.

5. An ad-hoc Discipline Policy Subcommittee reviews the schools' discipline policy and handbook.

**Council Role and Authority**

It is important to clearly define the role of the council. Principals can indicate that "advising" is to be distinguished from "problem solving," "decision making" and "service" functions. It is also important to identify the policy decisions that can and cannot be made at the school level. Principals are well aware of these distinctions but parents often are not.

**Relationship Between the Principal and the Council**

It is crucial that principals follow-up on councils' activity. While follow-up may not mean implementation of all suggestions, it could mean giving a report at the next meeting on the action that was or was not taken and why.

## STRATEGY NO. 60: PROBLEM-SOLVING COMMITTEES/AD-HOC TASK FORCES

### PURPOSE

To provide parents, who have a specific interest and/or a set amount of available time, the opportunity to serve as advisors and decision makers in areas of school policy.

### DESCRIPTION

Problem-solving committees and ad-hoc task forces are established to do a specific task in a specified amount of time. Composed of parents and other constituents at a school, these committees can be established at either the school or district level.

These committees usually meet and work intensively for a short period of time -- from three to six months. Their work culminates in a specific product -- a policy recommendation, a plan for facilities or program improvement, a report summarizing the results of a study, or an action plan to address an outstanding problem.

Some examples of issues and topics that problem solving committees and ad-hoc tasks forces have tackled include:

- Reviewing and redesigning a school report card.
- Developing an action plan to engage school, home and community involvement in substance abuse prevention.
- Developing guidelines for a health education curriculum that addresses students' needs while still respecting family and community values on sensitive issues such as human sexuality.
- Assessing the school building and grounds and identifying needed areas of improvement.
- Consulting with abutting neighbors, law enforcement agencies, and other community service agencies to develop a plan to decrease vandalism on the school grounds.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The basic difference between problem solving committees and other types of committees and school-community advisory councils is that the former go out of business once their job is done.

The temporary, focused nature of problem solving committees has implications for membership selection and composition. For example, formal election/selection by peers is not as necessary. High interest, commitment, and expertise on a given issue area are more crucial considerations.

Membership could be solicited through a number of vehicles:

- Notices sent home with school children.
- A "bulletin" in the school newsletter.
- Public service announcements in local community media, both print and electronic.
- Announcements at open houses or other regularly scheduled events that bring parents into the school.

## STRATEGY NO. 61: SCHOOL SITE GOVERNING BOARDS

### PURPOSE

To provide parents with a role in making school site policy.

### DESCRIPTION

A school site governing board is a decision making body for the school building. Composed of teachers and parents, it functions similarly to the board of trustees at a private school in that it sets policy for the school and makes final decisions over curriculum, personnel and budget matters that are within the purview of the school building.

One Massachusetts public school that has adopted this strategy has established a Steering Committee composed of equal numbers of parents and teachers. Its main characteristics are:

1. Peer selection: parents elect the parent members; teachers elect the teacher members.
2. Parity between school and community representation: the number of teachers plus the principal is equal to the number of parent representatives. "Parity" promotes consensus and coalition building. It means that the committee can not act unless at least some of the parents and teachers agree on an issue.
3. Subcommittees with extended members do the background work that produces the information and issues on which basis the Steering Committee makes its decisions. These subcommittees, each chaired by the members of the Steering Committee, have "extended members," i.e., interested parents and teachers who are not on the Steering Committee.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The "governing board" represents a highly developed form of parental involvement in decision making. It is most likely to be successful when:

1. The school has a strong base of involved and organized parents.

   In the absence of this base, there will not be an adequate number of parents to serve on the "extended" subcommittees whose work provides the foundation for the decisions made by the Steering Committee. Moreover, without the additional viewpoints of the "extended" members, the parents recruited to serve on the Steering Committee may not be representative of the parent community as a whole.

2. The school system has formally decentralized some decision-making authority to the school site.

3. There is a tradition of trust and cooperation between the teaching staff and the parent community. Teachers feel comfortable with

the fact that parents have an equal voice in final decisions about budget, program, personnel, physical plant, extra student services, etc.

4. The principal feels confident, in part because of support from his/her superiors in the central office, in sharing authority. As one principal put it, "As principal, I have no other power except my ability to persuade and my membership on the committee."

## STRATEGY NO. 62 : SYSTEMWIDE PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

### PURPOSE

Provide structured access for parental input into systemwide policy making.

### DESCRIPTION

A systemwide parent advisory council provides a vehicle for parents to contribute their perspective on systemwide policy issues. Their perspective, when combined with the professional expertise of the school administration and staff and the values and priorities of the community at large, can assist the school committee in its policy setting.

### IMPLEMENTATION

School systems that have developed these systemwide councils report that the following practices maximize the credibility and usefulness of these councils.

1. **Formal establishment by the school committee:** A "formal charter" from the school committee can lend credibility to a parents' advisory council. It also can establish a direct line of communication from the council to the school committee.

2. **A federated structure:** A Citywide Parents' Advisory Council in one of Massachusetts' larger cities is composed of two parents from each school, elected from the PTA/PTO, or other parents' councils in each school.

   This federated structure provides the council with direct links to parent organizations and parent concerns at each school. Its membership can reflect the spectrum of interests across the whole system. Also, the representatives on the council can become familiar with systemwide issues and, as delegates from individual schools, share this familiarity with their constituents.

   Additional representativeness on this council can be ensured by having additional parent representatives selected by special interest parents' organizations such as a systemwide Chapter 1 PAC, Bilingual PAC, or Special Education Advisory Council.

3. **Use of subcommittees with extended memberships:** Subcommittees allow the council to divide its labor and pursue specific issues. Extended memberships provide an opportunity for more parents to become involved. These subcommittees can be "standing" committees that address an ongoing function or temporary special purpose committees which undertake a specific task and disband.

4. **Regular and formal meetings:** Many councils meet once a month, while others meet every second or third month, providing time in between for subcommittees to do their background work.

   Formal meetings with minutes and resolutions provide systemwide parent councils with a way to present their views to the school committee. In one community, the minutes of the most recent advisory council meeting are a regular part of the school committee's agenda.

   Regular and well publicized meetings also help to keep the council in touch with the wider parent community. Through "open meetings" and "open hearings," the council can provide a forum for the policy views of parents.

5. **Focus on policy rather then grievances:** Through formal charters and consistent practice, the council should provide a forum for a discussion and promotion of parents' views about general policy. Other channels should be available for individual complaints.

6. **Relationship to the school administration and school staff:** Voting membership is limited to parents. School administrators and other professional staff participate as technical resource people. The council can be advisory either to the superintendent or to the school committee.

## STRATEGY NO. 63: PARENTS' CURRICULUM POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE

### PURPOSE

To provide an opportunity for parent input into curriculum planning.

### DESCRIPTION

Parent representatives from each school building (chosen by the local parent-teacher organization, building advisory councils, or recruited by principals if none of the above organizations exist at the school) comprise a Curriculum Review Committee which offers advisory recommendations on curriculum improvement proposals. These proposals emanate from the teaching staff or from the system's director of curriculum.

This Committee provides parents with a voice but not a final say in one of the more critical decision making areas in the school system: policies about what gets taught.

As a conduit for community expectations about the curriculum, the Parents Curriculum Review Committee canvasses the parent community about its expectations for curriculum.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Because parents and others may have strong opinions on the school program, a curriculum committee provides a channel for a cooperative exchange of views. Cooperation is best assured when:

1. The Committee's role is clearly defined as advisory.

2. A school staff person, such as a director of curriculum, is assigned to be a resource person for the Committee.

3. The school system has in place a formal process for curriculum development and review to which the Committee can respond.

## STRATEGY NO. 64: PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS FOR EACH ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

### PURPOSE

To provide secondary school parents with an opportunity to serve as advisors and decision makers in the area of curriculum review and development.

### DESCRIPTION

A Departmental Advisory Committee, composed of both parents and faculty, provides input to the Department heads of specific program areas, e.g., Science, English, and Social Studies.

**Rationale**

For parents, membership on such a committee represents a meaningful and manageable form of involvement. The program at the secondary school level is so differentiated that many lay people have difficulty getting a "handle on" the total school program. But many parents have vocational and avocational interests and expertise that parallel the content areas of the curriculum. A chemical engineer, for example, may offer a useful perspective on the chemistry curriculum in the science department.

**Function and Composition of the Committee**

The committee should include both parents and faculty. The number of faculty to be included depends on the size of the school and its teaching staff in any subject area. At a minimum, the department chair and one teacher should be included. Parent membership can be on a self-selected "come if you are interested" basis. The committee has an advisory rather than decision making role.

**Specific Roles for Parents**

The curriculum at the secondary school level is much more changeable than that at the primary level. It is in constant need of revision and adaptation in response to the knowledge explosion, the requirements of the workplace, and society's changing expectations of what young adults should know. The parent members of the committee could therefore:

- Provide input reflecting the changes in public perceptions of what youngsters should know.
- Share their own relevant experience about changes in the workplace that impact on the subject matter that is being taught.
- Share their experience of what activities and projects really interest their children.
- Canvass the opinion and perspectives of other parents, thereby broadening the committee's information base and validating its assumptions about the expectations of the parent community.
- Serve as "helpers" and "teachers" in any curriculum improvement or enrichment that is suggested by the committee.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

The number and the duration of these committees depends on the organization and needs of a particular school. These committees may be attached to each subject area or only to those that are the focus of special review and improvement. These committees may be permanent "standing committees" meeting on regular basis throughout the year. They may also be ad-hoc task groups charged with, for example, developing a response to a weakness identified in an accreditation study report.

Parents can be recruited in conjunction with Strategy No.3, "Secondary Level Course Outlines." The course outline packet can include a response form inviting parents to join an advisory committee in the subject area that includes this course and others like it.

## STRATEGY NO. 65: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENT PLACEMENT

**PURPOSE**

To provide parents with influence in classroom placement decisions. To utilize parents' knowledge about their children making more sensitive placement decisions.

DESCRIPTION

The rationale for this practice is that the principal knows the idiosyncrasies, strengths, and weakness of the teachers; parents have similar information and insights about their children. With both sets of information, the principal or a placement committee is better able to find the best possible match between teachers' teaching styles and children's learning styles.

In the spring, all parents are sent a letter soliciting their input on the kind of placement they believe would be beneficial for their children for the following year. This letter asks parents to describe, in as much detail as they wish, their child's strengths and weaknesses, needs or problems, learning and play styles, special likes and dislikes, interests, etc. The letter also explains that this information will be used to find the best possible classroom setting for that child.

The letter does not ask parents to choose a particular teacher or classroom.

IMPLEMENTATION

Schools that have used this approach report that, especially at first, the response rate is low. In time, however, parents recognize the value of this opportunity and become enthusiastic about being able to give their input on student placement.

Principals must be firm about insisting that parents' responses not include a request for a specific teacher. Such requests would result in a popularity contest for teachers and would not yield the valuable information that can be provided by parents' assessment of their children.

## STRATEGY NO. 66: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN STAFF HIRING AND EVALUATION

PURPOSE

To provide parents with a structured opportunity to participate in hiring school staff and in evaluating the performance of teachers and administrators.

DESCRIPTION

Parents can provide one of many perspectives that are utilized in hiring and evaluating school staff. Their perspective may be reflected through several levels of involvement.

**Level One:** Parents have input into the criteria that will be used in hiring and evaluating teachers and administrators but do not have direct input into hiring decisions or the evaluation process.

**Example:** Parents, with teachers and administrators, can be part of a task force that is charged with redesigning a job description for school principals or designing a new teacher evaluation procedure.

**Level Two:** Parents' perspectives on teachers or administrators being evaluated, or job candidates, are part of the data base that is used to make final decisions.

**Example:** A survey of parents, using anonmous responses, can be part of an evaluation procedure for teachers.

**Example:** Candidates for principal's position can be interviewed by the parents' organization at the school as well as by the formal hiring committee. The parents' organization can offer its advisory opinion about the candidate to the committee that will make the final decision.

**Level Three:** Parent representatives are directly involved in hiring decisions and in teacher evaluation as part of a team composed of the key constituencies in the school or school system.

**Example:** A system level Hiring and Evaluation Committee --composed of administrators, teachers, and parents -- advises the superintendent and school committee on personnel policies, hires all school administrators, and designs staff evaluation procedures.

**Example:** A Hiring and Evaluation Committee -- composed of the principal, teachers, and parents -- screens job candidates for teaching positions and, as a team, participates in teacher evaluation, including classroom observation.

IMPLEMENTATION

Parent involvement in personnel decisions will make the process longer, more laborious, and more time intensive. Schools and school systems that have involved parents at any of the three levels described above report, however, that over time the benefits outweigh the costs: through involvement in hiring and evaluation, parents gain a better understanding of and empathy for the challenging job of teaching students and administering schools.

Schools and systems with experience in this area suggest that any process for parental involvement in personnel decisions follow three rules of thumb:

1. Secure the agreement and cooperation of the teachers' and administrators' union. Put this agreement in writing.

2. Provide training to parents who will be involved in designing job descriptions, evaluation procedures, and classroom observation.

3. Where possible, recruit parent representatives from among the leadership of existing parent organizations, school-community councils, parent advisory committees, etc.

   These parent leaders are more knowledgeable about the school and its conditions for teaching. As leaders they can speak for their peers and share with other parents the information they learn as a result of being involved in the evaluation process.

## PART SIX

## SUPPORT SYSTEMS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Effective parent involvement must be seen as a routine rather than an add-on activity of the school. In order to be effective, these activities require resources: time, space, materials, and organizational commitment. The strategies described in this book all require these resources to some degree in order to be implemented.

The strategies in Part Six are designed to help schools "institutionalize" their parental involvement so that it becomes a routine way of doing business for the school. These approaches also will help schools to ensure that their programming and services are reaching all parents, meeting parents' needs, and benefitting from available community resources.

The approaches described in this section can help to ensure that parent involvement is on-going, effective, and reaches all parents. These strategies require human and material commitments by the school that will be repaid in a stronger student body and school.



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## STRATEGY NO. 67: EVALUATING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A SCHOOL'S SELF ASSESSMENT

### PURPOSE

To raise awareness about what the school is doing, is not doing, and could be doing to involve all parents in their children's education.

### DESCRIPTION

A self-assessment can be a simple checklist of questions that direct attention to what research and experience have shown to be the key issues regarding a school's ability to involve parents. Such a checklist might pose the following questions:

1. Does our school have an organized parent involvement plan?
2. Are there roughly equal opportunities for parents to be involved as helpers, learners, teachers, and advisors and decision makers?
3. Are there opportunities for parents to be involved with their children's education at home? Are involvement opportunities limited only to those parents who have the time to come into the school?
4. Are there certain groups of parents that we almost never see at our school?
5. Is there continuity of parent involvement across grade levels and not only involvement by parents in certain grades?
6. Are parents provided with skills training or with information that they need to become effectively involved in school or in their children's education?
7. Do teachers receive clerical and logistical support for their efforts to involve parents?
8. Do teachers receive training for parent involvement?

### IMPLEMENTATION

The above checklist, with other or additional items that make sense locally, can serve as the basis for a discussion at school faculty meetings, parents' councils, or parent-teacher organization meetings. With a slight change in wording it can be turned into a mini-survey for parents included in the school newsletter or distributed as a handout at open houses, parent teacher conferences, etc.

## STRATEGY NO. 68: "ACTION PLANS" FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### PURPOSE

To coordinate the various parent involvement initiatives at the school. To provide for a wide range of mutually reinforcing parent involvement programs that recognize the various roles that parents can play.

### DESCRIPTION

The next page contains a sample one page "Action Plan" for implementing activities related to the goal of improving home-school communication. The sample is borrowed from the **Home-School Partnership Planner (1987)**, prepared by Janet Chrispeels of the San Diego County Office of Community Education.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Schools adopting this format can produce a similar one page "Action Plan" for each parent involvement goal in a given year. This format is useful because it translates a goal into a set of activities and focuses attention on key questions, including:

SAMPLE

ACTION PLAN FOR STRENGTHENING HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Area of Focus: Communications

Activities: Improve monthly school newsletter

| What will be done | Purpose of the Activity | By Whom | When | Materials/ Equipment Needed | Evidence of Success |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Each newsletter will include a mini-survey or some type of parent response (usually in the form of a tear-off sheet) | Disseminate parent education information on a regular basis | PR Committee chairperson or community aide or SIP coordinator, etc. | each month | Access to parent education materials | Increased responses on parent response portion of newsletter |
| Each newsletter will have a parent education section or article | Provide opportunity for school to receive parent feedback and information from parents on specific questions | PR Committee, etc. | each month | Survey admin., staff parents to determine subject and needs | Increased responses on parent response portion of newsletter |
| Improve graphics in newsletter | Improve appearance and readability of newsletter | Secretary, computer center, aides, parents, students | each month | Collect pictures; graphics from computer software and workbooks | List of groups newsletter is distributed to |
| Distribute newsletters to community groups (non-parent), local newspaper | Increase community understanding of school program and activities; possibly increase community involvement through understanding | Parent Committee who has community contacts and are involved in other organizations, PTA | each month | transportation; postage | Increased responses on parent response portion of newsletter |
| Each newsletter will include a student corner or feature something students will want or need to do, such as a game, joke, etc. | Students will want to take newsletter home and be involved with it and aware of it | Staff, parents, students | each month | Children's books and magazines | Increased number of parents responding to newsletter taken home |



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- What will be done? What concrete steps will be taken?
- Why are you taking those steps? What purposes does the activity serve?
- By whom?
- By when?
- What materials and equipment are needed?
- How will you know if its working? What is the evidence of success?

The "Action Plan" format can give a parents' group or individual teachers a framework in which to take concrete, doable steps to increase parent involvement. As the boxes within each "Action Plan" are filled out, the individual sheets become a vehicle for communicating with parents.

This communication can be used to stimulate parents to volunteer. For example, as these "Action Plans" are developed there may be empty spaces in the "By Whom" box for certain activities. Interested parents can be invited to consider signing up for an activity that needs a volunteer.

## STRATEGY NO. 69: PARENT LIAISONS

### PURPOSE

To provide a structure that enhances the continued involvement of parents. To allocate responsibility that provides continuity for the school's parent involvement initiatives.

### DESCRIPTION

Parents are hired to work on a full or part time basis as parent liaisons in the schools. These parent liaisons, who are members of the community, work with teachers, administrators and parents to provide coordination and advocacy for parent involvement. These parents play two roles: They are the primary contact people who respond to the needs and concerns of particular parents; they create ongoing mechanisms through which parents can play a variety of roles at the school. In the latter capacity, parent liaisons can:

- Create and publish school newsletters or other forms of communication.
- Coordinate school tours and orientation sessions for new parents.
- Conduct surveys of parents' and teachers' needs and interests and play "match makers" in promoting parent-teacher partnerships.
- Coordinate and implement outreach to traditionally non-participating parents to involve them in the life of the school.
- Coordinate parent education events.

Parent liaisons can provide the leadership and resource coordination for many of the parent involvement strategies presented in this booklet.

### IMPLEMENTATION

While it is possible to implement this practice in one building at a time, it can be more effectively implemented if a number of a schools are involved. This provides for the "economies-of-scale" in which materials, supplies, and clerical support are shared among several schools.

For school systems that lack the funds to support paid parent liaisons, the position can be filled by members of an organized School Volunteer Program.

In small school systems, with five or fewer school buildings, the parent liaison functions and position can be systemwide rather than building based.

In medium sized school systems, there could be two or more parent liaisons by grade levels, e.g., elementary, middle, and secondary.

## STRATEGY NO. 70: PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS

### PURPOSE

To provide support, information, training, and other assistance to parents in a school system.

### DESCRIPTION

Parent Information Centers are established at the system or district level to facilitate parent involvement efforts throughout the system or district. These Centers are staffed by parent coordinators or outreach workers who speak the language of linguistic minority parents and can relate sensitively to the concerns and needs of parents.

Centers generally have a range of informational materials for parents: school handbooks and calendars; descriptions of the schools in the system; school registration forms; home-learning ideas for children; and flyers on resources for parents such as workshops, ESL classes, health care services, etc. In addition, Centers offer child-sized tables and chairs at which children can play with toys and read books while their parents are obtaining information or participating in workshops.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Parent Information Centers develop their programming based on the needs of their parent community. Some systems, which have implemented "parent choice" approaches to school selection, use their Centers as central clearinghouses for information on each school in the district. Systems also encourage their Centers to be warm and friendly introductions to the schools for parents who may have had negative or intimidating previous experiences with schools.

In developing Parent Information Centers, school systems may want to consider the following approaches:

1. **Communicate and Disseminate Information**
   - o Ensure a welcoming and attractive Center through the use of colorful decorations and signs - in all languages.
   - o Provide attractive, colorful, and easily read materials on the schools.
   - o Provide video and print materials for parents.
   - o Translate all materials into appropriate languages.
   - o Make follow-up telephone contact with parents to reinforce their welcome at the Center.
   - o Use parents to call and share information with other parents.
   - o Develop Center newsletters that are sent to all parents describing school programs and the services of the Center.
2. **Provide Training to Parents**
   - o Offer a broad range of workshops for parents on issues ranging from child rearing, social issues, and home-learning for children to assisting with specific academic areas.
   - o Make training videos available to parents.
   - o Hold "hands-on" workshops to which parents bring younger children to "practice" home-learning strategies.
   - o Include information on assisting children with learning in each newsletter.
3. **Support Parent Advisory Councils**
   - o Disseminate materials, developed by the Center and by others, on serving on school councils.

- o Offer workshops for members of councils.
- o Assist in the identification and recruitment of parents for advisory councils.
- o Publicize opportunities to serve on advisory councils.

4. **Actively Reach Out to Parents**

- o Hold special events, such as ethnic festivals, orientation breakfasts, meetings with principals, etc., that attract new parents to the Center.
- o Run tours of schools for parents.
- o Use community media outlets and local agencies, churches, and organizations to publicize the activities and services of the Center

## STRATEGY NO. 71: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: HONORING LOCAL STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

### PURPOSE

Colleges and universities can promote parental involvement in public schools by inviting parents to participate in award ceremonies and competitions that honor student achievement.

### DESCRIPTION

Boston University has hosted a special award ceremony to honor seventh grade students (and their parents) across the Commonwealth who have demonstrated outstanding academic potential in the Johns Hopkins Talent Search. Later in the day, the University and its professors offers students and parents the opportunity to learn first hand about new findings in many fields. There is ample opportunity for students and parents to talk with B.U. faculty and to explore ways in which students and parents can continue to learn together as a family. Some university staff have also been willing to assist talented students with greater academic challenges. The university can be a rich resource for parents, students, and school personnel.

### IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel can approach nearby colleges and universities to sponsor recognition ceremonies for many types of academic excellence. Undergraduate deans of admissions or directors of continuing education are often particularly interested in ways to do outreach to public school students and their parents. There are many possibilities. The winners of the Math Olympiad Regional Competition and their parents can be honored at a college or university with a strong reputation in mathematics. The final round of a regional spelling bee or debating contest can be held at colleges with strong departments in English or Theater Arts. School personnel can:

- o Approach the university to determine interest.
- o Work with university staff to design the program.
- o Publicize the program in the print and electronic media.
- o Recognize the university for its contribution to the school and community.

## STRATEGY NO. 72: CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE: RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN MOTIVATING CHILDREN TO ACHIEVE IN SCHOOL

### PURPOSE

To validate the efforts of parents who help their children to set high standards for learning and to formally recognize students' academic achievements.

### DESCRIPTION

**Education Sunday**

The congregation can hold a special service and celebration to honor the academic accomplishments of students at the end of the school year and to acknowledge the efforts of their parents in helping them to achieve academic success. School personnel can be invited to attend and can be honored for their dedication to helping students learn. After the service the honored parents and students can join discussion groups to share ideas with other members in the congregation about ways that families can motivate and support their children to do well in school.

In addition to Education Sunday, the church and synagogue can support and recognize student achievement in a variety of other ways, such as making student participation in church activities dependent on completion of homework assignments and encouraging members of the congregation to tutor students who need help. For example:

- Several local churches have made participation in their children's choir dependent upon a student's receiving passing grades.
- Some churches have also established "homework and tutoring" clubs to help children whose grades have fallen behind so that they can receive the necessary support and assistance.

The church and synagogue can sponsor parent workshops to help families within the congregation create a supportive and caring peer network. Parents can be invited to share their concerns and identify topics that they would like to learn more about. Frequently parents are interested in discussing topics related to children's growth and development. They are also interested in discussing ways that they can help students do better in school, increase their self esteem as learners, and complete their homework assignments on time. School personnel can be invited to the church or synagogue to discuss these topics with parent groups.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Parents who are members of these institutions may take the lead in planning recognition ceremonies and other activities to support student achievement. They may:

- Help the clergy to plan and organize activities for Education Sunday.
- Identify church activities for students that require successful school performance for participation.
- Plan discussion groups for parents on topics of interest.
- Invite school personnel to participate in parent discussion groups and to share information.

## STRATEGY NO. 73: MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS HELP SCHOOLS TO REACH PARENTS

### PURPOSE

To expand parental involvement in the school by collaborating with museums and cultural organizations.

## DESCRIPTION

Many museums and cultural organizations are expanding their offerings from classes that serve children exclusively, to activities that are designed for children and parents. There are opportunities for school personnel to incorporate these activities into school curriculum and thereby capitalize on parents' interest and support.

For example: The Boston Museum of Fine Arts has developed a guide for parents to follow when they bring their children to visit. The guide provides a sequence of activities and suggestions that can help the parent and child to get the most out of the museum experience. In addition, the education staff at the museum develop curriculum and learning activities for every special art exhibit to be shown during the course of the year. School personnel can visit the museum, learn about up-and-coming exhibits, and work with museum staff to identify ways to relate these exhibits to the school curriculum. School personnel can develop their own learning activities to accompany museum exhibits, cosponsor a program with the museum to share these activities with parents, invite parental feedback, and provide students with opportunities for classroom followup.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Staff from museums and cultural organizations are frequently looking for ways to develop interest in their program activities and to connect with parents. School personnel can collaborate with outreach efforts to the mutual benefits of schools, parents, and appropriate museums and cultural organizations.

School staff can:

- Contact staff from museums and cultural organizations in September for the year's schedule of activities and major exhibits.
- Identify related activities that can be incorporated into the school's curriculum.
- Meet with museum staff to plan ways to publicize a jointly sponsored program of activities for parents and students.